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DEATH

By Charlotte W. Stephens

This thing called Death — is it an end or a beginning?
Does it defraud us of our loves and hates,
Giving us nothing in return but vacuum?
I contemplate it thus, not too sad-hearted,
Foretasting now the balm of dreamless sleep
And freedom from all earthly fear and bafflement —
Oblivion eternal, dust unto dust, Amen!

But rather would I know you, Death, as something beautiful,
Bringing perfection to sick, thwarted souls:
An accolade bestowed upon us all
For living in this Vale of Tears —
A glorious second chance given our spirit selves
To tap some vasty reservoir of power and omniscience.

O Death, art thou a birth of opportunity
For us poor humans? A heaven-sent reprieve
Given us to see what we can make of living
Quite unencumbered, in a rarer world,
Where this life's problems are resolved and clear,
And some new challenge, unconceived, awaits
The freshened essence of our personalities?

THE GUARDIAN

By HENRI DE REGNIER

(*Translated by Marie C. Mengers*)

I appeared to myself in you as a distant shadow.
— Stéphen Mallarmé.

EMBLEMATIC CHARACTERS

The Guardian
The Master
The Two Brothers-in-Arms

An antique forest, on a hill, surrounds an old manor in ruins among uncultivated gardens.

A stone threshold holds up a heavy unhinged, closed door.

The Master emerges from one of the paths of the forest, supported by his Brothers-in-Arms.

The sun is setting behind the trees; it grazes yellowing peaks and the gables of the Manor.

The Master

O forests, beautiful with autumns lone,
My childhood wove your leaves to crowns; now grown
You have forgotten where my footsteps pass . . .
Alas! . . . . . .
And you have aged from dawns and autumns lone.

O sorrow, eventide, return from far!
How very dark the pathways are
That lead the way unto the manor old;
The grass and flowers are dead and cold
Under the foliage of each too-strong branch,
The moss gnaws at the bark most staunch,
As rusts on twisted bright blades launch,
Or Time devours the lovely Hopes we hold.

O sorrow, O night's cold!

One of the Brothers-in-Arms

My lord, behold, among the trees,
The aged castle you desired
To see again now at this fevered hour of tears and harms
In which your glorious wounds bleed on your arms,
While in your Soul,
As clarions hush to hear the flute
Of shepherds with their flocks that graze and bleat,
Dreams shudder where does renew, repeat,
With all her dismal nights with dawns replete
All the mute past whom anguish calls, to meet.

Here is the aged castle, — marble and cement, —
In its forsaken gentleness,
Amid the treeless garden spent, —
And with its antique walls, — frustrate,
And garlands of the portal, spiraled gate.

The Master

I thank you in this threshold's name to which you guide.
The Past, behind the forest, is the eventide,
The sea beyond the plains, the shores, the wasted lands;
It is the shadow where the bird does hide
Which bled once from an arrow in the wing,
For having soared o'er pikes and bows and brands.

Thank you, my brothers, your steps have opened wide
Again the forest; and my soul returns to its dream-lands.

He advances several paces. The Brothers-in-Arms watch him and speak alternately in undertones.

The One

The Sword, alas! within his hands has shone. The torch,
Lofty, not any more lights the vast porch
Of the Palace his fame built to fame on a height.

The Other

And evenings will pass o'er the face of the years
And the Brave for those dawns will shed their tears

Which were born since the Hero took end in the night.

THE ONE

Yet, oh, what renown to oblivion is consigned!

THE OTHER

Gonfalon whose ample fold Time will stiffen and bind!

THE ONE

Tall lance that the rain and the shadow will rust!

THE OTHER

Sword to the hilt in the somber soil thrust.

TOGETHER

Behold Destiny here consults the Destined Ends.

THE MASTER

Who turns towards them.

My evening in tears returns to its morning, friends!
Astonished to survive, see my weakness stumble,
The lying cup of gold tasted of brass more humble
If I have drunk of pride's intoxication strange:
Shame! and the mournful potion of glory,
Its bitter smoke is dead within my memory.
I feel myself another now, and the hour does change.

He draws the sword suspended at his side.

Come, behold the illustrious Blade, and with its hilt
Where the gem will forget the hand that made it shining fair
My hand, detached from the ancient folly's care,
Knocks, this peaceful night, at the gate where a tomb is built.

Open, thou, whom Time has sealed, hard leaf,
O walls, O halls, and thou, sweet hearth,
Shine for the vagabond, for the unconsoled one's grief,

And dry the shepherd's cloak and the wanderer's [of
the earth].
Gate whose key at night, to take no one would lief!
And let the beggar-maids and passers pale
Shelter beneath this roof their misery sore
Where comes to dream the one whose hands in battle-mail
Renounce the Sword and curse the array of war;
This sword I give to you.

Farewell, pray that the shadow be kind to me, Brothers
two,
And that my hands which with a gesture through the
nights would roil
The galop of the horses to the harvests of the soil
And which would hoist the pennant and whose ring
beautiful
Shone with a ruby like dead blood within a pool,
May obtain the aid of being idle evermore
Through living fountains' ample ablution, cleansed of
war!
Absolve these guilty hands, O tears that seep,
From crime of war, from pride of jousting keep
Absolved by mourning women on the roads, who weep,
By the forgetful dead beneath their vaults, who sleep.

Farewell, I greet you on the threshold of peace, calm,
In the name of bitter laurel old and of the palm,
You whose ardent Life its law did not deny,
You who were what I was, and better far than I,
You for whom the forest is fresh and ample shade
Without a phantom pale there seeking you who evade,
And who beneath the cloth and armor-plate hid not
The ill healèd regret of some obscure wounded spot
And who the desperate weight have not dragged or borne
Of a heavy cloak of dreams that is half torn.

When your steps will be dead as my voice will be dead,
With the supreme farewell which conjures you at last
To forget, on leaving, these woodland paths you tread
This castle forgot where my age walls itself in fast,

Of those who wave th'injurious sword there will remain
No more upon the shore nor yet upon the plain
Where his footsteps toward the sunset perhaps still bleed
Aside from some renown Death will lessen indeed,
But someone who comes, one night, to the castle which
falls
Stone by stone as our days proceed to the tomb's walls
To see if in the Dream and the Night nought might be
Remaining of another or of that which was he,
And confront, on the threshold where ruins encumber
His Soul, now face to face, alas! with his umber.

The Brothers-in-Arms disappear into the forest. The evening wind shivers and through the trees, in the sky previously a little darkened, the last rays of the sunset are shining.

Silence has kissed my pallid lips,
Breaths pass across my hands,
And the twilight hastens to close me in
Far from the paths throughout those lands.

Here is the end at last, the halt supreme.

My wound closes itself and weeps
Where blood grazes my flesh as it seeps.

The tragic past is dying with the night.

He who walked at my side,
Did not abide,
I feel no more his hand in mine, now numb,
No longer do I know the roads where he did guide
My steps among alarms and battle's noise and pride;
He left me there in order that I come
Alone unto the ancient home
Where his hand in mine he lay.

One day:

Was it not the springtime of a year
That I did not see was faded, drear?
The roses climbed to the towers' last tier,
The garden blossomed according to my soul,
The doves flew about the towers here
And the doves' return it was so near
That they cooed in my soul,
Already, and the dawn and my pale soul
With wings and flowers were filled and whole,

The peacocks wandered 'mid blue heliotrope
And wearied their glory which itself enthrones
And with itself, itself does envelope,

And I wove flowers into crowns,
Into crowns that never close,
Into garlands never finished,
My love burned in melancholies undiminished,
As through the smoke the young flame's ardent rose.

Her hands enchanted the dawn surrounding Her
And I was near to Her.
Enchanted was I,
She was so much mine,

She was so much in me
That I sought her in the silence,
That closing my eyes I sought her there;
The warm sun streamed over her hair,
The morning beamed on our adolescence.

O God! then a cry, from the startled plain,
Rose among our candor, vanished, slain,
And on a flowering knoll crushed by their hard foot sure,
Through the hour's repose, through the calm of the azure
And the sacred dream of peace and of silence,
Four Heralds, standing beside the lance
Of which each planted at his side had hold,
Clothed with the heavy tabard where shone in cloth of gold
The hydra's scales and the teeth of the child-fed asp,

Let the buccal cry from their brass horns rasp,

And the army about them covered the flowering plain.

Armor whereon the enameller's art in silver without stain
Had set in gems of the clearest drops of dew;
Helmets whereon spread aloft, and broken, too,
Wings of great eagles in their iron featherings,
Swords dazzling and twisted as are the lightnings,
All the brute array of blood and victories won
And horses in their watered silk caparison,
The hard fists enamelled with steel gauntlets,
The torsos full and swelling out the corselets,
And faces that anger flushes red from pride
Where the boss burst forth where the chin-strap is tied
And the brass and the silk and the bronze and gold
Pennons at the blast of horns waving fold on fold,
A fierce cavalcade whose noise rings loud in the plain,
Behind whose step, alas! is harvested no grain,
With their iron-clad step the whole heavy horde
Passing through my dream with shouts have poured!
And past the flowering doves, I, a foolish child,
Past peacocks through the prairies scattered wild,
Far from my Love in tears who took in hers my hands,
On their steps which struck upon the roads' hard sands
I followed the helmed prestige of falsely destined hours,
Until this very night when towards the ruined towers
My soul from fleshly shames at last comes back
And by a blackened hearth on days now at an end,
Deep shadows where my twilight fades will now descend.

Perish, O visions, whose error itself denudes!

In the plain, the clarions of the dispersing army ring out.

And you are howling still, into my solitudes,
Tenacious cry, brutal call repudiated,
Falsehood from all my sadness obliterated!
Among the burning briar and the thorn and nettle,

As dogs who at the foot of hills, crouching, settle.
Who lick at your heels and yet would bite your hand,
Sadly weeping at the cross-roads' angle you stand,
And your plaint wherein foams like drool, pride and
haughtiness,
Troubles no more my life a prey to bitterness
Of having followed at your call where you would bid,
Under my mourning cloak my wounded flesh is hid.

The sound of the clarions rings
out and dies away.

And I hate you, fierce clarions whose breath
And note resound long in my dream where Death
Leans on her elbow by Silence to sleep;
On you, flashings of sword and lance, curses I heap,
On nights of glory snatched from men, bitter vanquished
ones,
And cold nights beneath the stars beside the oceans,
And you, O foolish Pride, in whom anger greets a host,
Standing with torch held high; along the rivers' coast,
Along the forests' edge hard marches we would make,
Bleeding hands laved at the spring where my thirst I slake
And wound tingeing red the fountain where I cry,
To have, alas! according to the hour's mastery
Mingled my pale face with the face of pride,
Insulting every widow by the door of her hearthside
Who to my cursed name vows a Fate dark and gory.

And I hate you, O pennons, for this allegory
That the evening wind would shake, ample in your folds,
Staff where the rampant griffon by his nails clutching,
holds,
And your rearing leap, Unicorns dapple-gray
Whose emblem carried off, beyond the thickest fray,
Those whose soul, like to the beasts upon the shield,
Saw them 'gainst the sky of the horizon revealed
Where in the flight of their wings shone their claws!
Armor that the hole of wounds mortal in cause
Covered, bristling with arrows and darts in a sheaf,

Empty magniloquence and pomp that is but grief,
Wherein you laughed, O Sun! you flashed your laughing joke
As in the breastplate mirror, flashing from the cloak
Of my dark melancholies whose shreds remain fast
To branches of the past in the forest we passed,
Taciturn, and thinking that through the dark wood's glade
My Soul was following me perhaps like to a Shade
Faithful to the sweetness that once I did deny
And mingling tears with turbulent battle's hard cry,
With those hands so gentle to flesh that's torn and harmed
That weeping women have who follow on the armed.

The sunset has faded out. Twilight.

Receive me, O manor, impoverished by desertion,
Open your door as a pardoning assertion,
Be she who is no more and he who I may be,
Let your ruin crumble, stone by stone, on my distress,
O empty room, be my hostess,
O roof, let no star shine on my nights or on me!
I am disaster and mourning drear
Who kneel them down on the threshold here.

O sweet forgotten one, if every night
When you would weep there where you stood,
Upon the lawn, or by your mirror bright,
When you would weep alone in lassitude,

If your lips have not cursed me with all their pallor's approach,
If your woes have forgiven with all the kind thoughts of their pain,
If your mouth was not dry from having called to me in vain,
If your eyes were not implacable from all their weeping sore,
If thought of me was sweet to you
From all the sorrow that you bore,

If the shade of the tomb (perhaps) guards your calm face,
dead,
If those who buried you (perhaps) have said:
How fair and sweet she is in silenced breath,
How forgiving she is in death,
Oh! let me re-enter the house of olden days,
For I am he who weeps and prays.

He knocks at the door.

THE GUARDIAN

(*half in the shadow and veiled*)

You who knock in the name of the past
And of all the woe you weep,
Returned on your lost steps for aye at last
From bitter adventure's darkest deep,
O you whose very haughty pride
By claws of chimeras is bent, denied,

Enter!

Poor Soul! what laurel shades at last your eventide
Weary of gloomy sport, deceiving hope, and pride;
Does the torch
Shed light upon the road that would skin your foot and
scorch!
You come with what a face in my mirrors to be spied?
The escort of your glory is it neighing at the porch?

What trophy bright at last of swords and dreams
Do you come in the shade to append to pomp of walls and
doors?
Of medals struck in memory that gleams
Of escapades magnificent what streams
Heap themselves now upon these hard paved floors?

No, nothing but your pale distress,
Your wounds, your tears, your loneliness,
Your doubt down towards the shade in echoes multiply,
Of one name vast for aye with tears and sounds,

And pride aglow where shock of arms resounds,
In the whole Soul profound
And now repents when tasks are done and sombre is the sky,
Say, what have you found of the flowers of our joy today
In the garden spoiled, laid low?
Under what crown do we see your proud head weigh,
What wind of glory, then, did blow
To make your cloak in rags display
Its bloody fold of woe?
What dazzling suns have shone that nearly white
Your hair appears to be now in the Night?

Enter!

I love your gaze without surprise
That here I am, not far;
As was our spring, behold our autumn lies
Here found again just as we are.

O Wanderer, into darkness has bled many an eventide
Of august glories and of blood, of mournful, sorrowing pride,
You who parting from a dream to a dream returned again,
Through and beyond those ancient wrongs and through that error vain,
With your shadow clinging to your heels did pass
Along the infinite roadway where you toiled, alas!

Was I not always near you, I your Soul, the same
Who was your shade in sunshine, and the sprite
Who mounted from the fires into flame
When your glory camped on many a land's disastrous plight?

I was in the looks that misery starves, [O shame!],
And in the sadness of the men you did acclaim,
And for your blessed wounds my hands have cared
And it was I on whom your agonies have stared.

She withdraws into the shadow.

I open the castle of wisdom and dreaminess
Where the threshold in ruins disjoins from the lofty door,
And, if the lighted hearth warms poorly your distress,
Think of your vanished days, weep, and your faults
deplore.

If in the forest sad where the wind prowls in pain,
The trees drop, one by one, their leaves into the brook,
Think that 'tis Autumn now and the harvest vain
For those who from early dawn their work forsook.

I await you on the threshold where the evening is more
somber
Than all the twilight there where your pain and sorrow
quakes.
The abode to which I welcome is the house of umber,
And my face before the autumn a grave expression takes,

As in the flowering garden at the hour where formerly
Your soul would tremble at glories divined,
I have the same advice and look as pallidly
As then when I begged your false Fate to be kind.

I am the same one still if your Soul the same at last
Is as the one that Hope did venture in the fold
Of his banner carried high, and the Emblem of the past
I stay, which still persists through your forgetting cold.

Come, I open wide the door, and if your soul is rather
Aged from so much effort lost in its bitter folly,
Reproach alone yourself the little that will gather
From off our spreading vine your fault and melancholy,

Be my silence at the last the sole reply I pronounce.
If my table of beech frugal is to celebrate,
My abode is in accord with him who will renounce
And who places his hands in the hands of his Fate.

SHOLEM ASCH

By Charles A. Madison

Sholem Asch is the first Yiddish writer to rank among the leading novelists of our time. Born in 1880 in a small Polish village, brought up in a completely orthodox environment, drilled in Jewish lore and completely self-taught, he found himself famous among his Warsaw colleagues with the appearance of his first published work in 1904. Four years later his play, *The God of Vengeance,* was produced successfully in the best Continental theatres, making his subsequent translated writings more than welcome in a half dozen countries. However, the several early attempts to bring his novels to the attention of American readers were not very encouraging; the milieu of these stories was too exotic and their characters too outlandish for popular appeal. But in 1933 time, theme, and treatment combined in *Three Cities* to give it a prominent place on the best-seller lists. Since then Asch's publisher has found it profitable to issue one or more of his later works annually, and *The Nazarene* especially has been phenomenally successful. This wide acclaim of the outstanding Yiddish novelist, opening to tens of thousands of Americans vistas of Jewish life at once poignant and unfamiliar, gives point and timeliness to a critical study of his prolific writings.

It is not surprising that Sholem Asch's first work should have placed him at once among the eminent Yiddish writers. When *The Village* appeared in 1904, modern Yiddish literature was still in its first efflorescence. New writers were welcomed and encouraged. And Asch stood out among the younger arrivals in Warsaw. In his early twenties, handsome, fiery, magnetic, overflowing with artistic fervor, he impressed everyone with the promise of his genius. The idyllic lyricism of his first stories, striking a fresh and delightful note, was immediately recognized and acclaimed. Critics, moreover, found his portrayal of chassidic life different from and superior to that of Dienensohn, Lienetsky, and even Peretz.

The Village is in truth a long prose poem. The pristine milieu of the rural Jewish settlement is described with the

ecstasy of first love. In contrast to the squalid and sordid Jews of the Warsaw ghetto, in which Asch then lived, the wholesome and naive rustics with whom he had spent his impressionable childhood appeared in his imagination as an idyllic folk — firmly founded in the revered faith of their fathers, inured to the cherished social customs and economic practices of the Middle Ages, and endowed with the carnal robustness of the peasantry. In depicting these idealized chassidim, pulsating with the earthy life of their pastoral environment, Asch also revealed a love of nature as novel to his readers as his villagers. He was, indeed, the first Yiddish writer to paint the out-of-doors with pagan joy, the first to luxuriate in the description of sensuous beauty for its own sake.

Wealthy Reb Shlome, which followed soon after, was a maturer and more variegated portrayal of the same village life. In neither story is plot of any consequence; but in the latter, as indicated by the title, character becomes a more positive factor. Reb Shlome, for whom Asch's father served as the prototype, is imbued with glowing reality. From the moment he enters the narrative on his return home for the Sabbath till he celebrates the betrothal of his son to the daughter of his favored rabbi, Reb Shlome lives by virtue of his dominant personality. His genuine benevolence, his complete piety, his wholehearted sympathy, his repeated triumphs over his "evil thoughts" — these traits taken together give him the rich lustre of a biblical patriarch. Winsomely animated also is Chanele, his young wife. Marrying at the age of eighteen a widower nearly thrice her age and the father of seven children, for the price of a comfortable home, she nevertheless learns to love her husband with all the chasteness of her simple heart. Like all pious Jewesses, she exerts herself to the utmost to please God and Reb Shlome by trying to manage the large establishment after the manner of its original mistress. By the time she gives birth to her first child at the end of the book, she has ingratiated herself into the favor not only of her indulgent husband but also of the critical reader.

Not character, however, but milieu assumes first importance in these stories of village life. The market street, the synagog, the patriarch's open house, the Vistula River, the

soil and its products, Jews and peasants — all play their tuneful instruments in the idyllic symphony. Each day has its own significance, every season its special timeliness. The poet's delight in growing things and in man's proximity to nature pervades every page. With particular fervor are described the peace of soul and beauty of spirit with which the chassidim welcome their beloved Sabbath:

"The Sabbath came at a peaceful gait. The dark night spread over the sky like a black silk shawl spangled with stars. The village was enveloped in sombre shadows, all stores were closed, lighted Sabbath candles peered from many windows. Jews were already returning from the synagog. Reb Shlome was with his son-in-law, his sons, his servants, and a group of impecunious guests. He walked leisurely, with Sabbath steps, stroked his thick black beard, spreading it over his starched white shirt and his black silk gabardine, and the Jewish spirit was very evident in him. He looked at the poor village Gentiles who idled about in the street and pitied them with all his heart."

If the Sabbath is welcomed, so are the market days. Once or twice weekly the peasants come from the outlying farms with wagonloads of produce, the Jewish traders arrive with money or manufactured articles, and both groups barter and bargain until dusk. Not infrequently a Jew tries to cheat some lout, or a farmer gets drunk with his newly gotten cash, and the result is a free-for-all. Farmers forsake their wagons to join the fray, and the embattled traders fight back with righteous zeal. Heads are bashed, and blood flows freely on both sides. Presently a Jew like Reb Shlome and some of the older peasants arrange a truce; the culprits are punished on the spot, and the erstwhile adversaries toast one another with vodka and conclude that one God rules over both Jews and Christians.

Asch paints these village scenes with romantic gusto. Drawing upon the authentic memories of his active youth, he invests his narrative with the breadth and beauty of the epic. He endows his rustics with heroic stature, and the magic of his glowing prose transforms their homely environment into an idealized background. The lyric quality of his writing accentuates, however, not character but setting, not action but description. As a consequence Jewish village life

in his first writings is recorded not with Mendele's acrid realism or Raisen's ironic pathos but with the idyllic sensuousness of the pastoral.

2.

It was natural for the young Asch to envisage life with the imaginative ardor of the poet, to write most artistically when weaving visions of sensuous beauty. His first stories came straight from the heart and are naive outbursts of lyric narrative. The success of *The Village* and *Wealthy Reb Shlome,* however, forced him into the social turmoil of the time. Russian and Polish and German translations of these and subsequent works were bringing him the friendships of men prominent in various fields of cultural activity. Before long he began to grapple with literary problems and theories of art; to take a deep interest in the political rebellion which was then sweeping the land. A reading of the better books published at the turn of the century, enlarging his literary horizon, stimulated him to devote his talents to the clarification of ideas and issues of social consequence. In emulation of the leading Russian writers of the period he turned to the portrayal of the seething vitality of the city — on the one hand, the shame of its stinking slums; and on the other, the glory of revolutionary ardor.

With the zeal of an enthusiastic convert, Asch wrote plays, novels, and short stories in which he expounded his views on the pressing problems of the time. *Downstream,* his first dramatic effort, propounds rhetorically the then painful theme of religious doubt. Naive skepticism and futile faith-seeking of his generation are presented more cogently in *The Messiah Period* and *The Inheritors.* In the first play three living generations are brought face to face: the pious grandparents, the agnostic, bourgeois middle group, and the idealistic youths who gasp for the breath of a living faith. In *The Inheritors* a cultivated banker, priding himself on his tolerant rationalism, is despised by his own children for his devotion to business; his oldest son leaves him to dedicate himself to the study of Jewish problems, and his beloved daughter is kept from going to a convent only by the sagacity of her pious grandfather. In these plays Asch is at great pains to demonstrate the spiritual bankruptcy of

the middle-class Jews and the desperate groping of their children for a new religion. He is unable, however, to develop his themes clearly and directly. Moreover, the major characters are wanting in dramatic vitality: they are not so much individuals in their own right as obviously generalized types mouthing their assigned parts. Taken as a whole, these works are weak polemics leavened with incidents of poetic charm.

Mary and its sequel *The Road to Oneself* depict the Jewish youth as they plunge into the whirlpool of political rebellion, are overwhelmed by the reign of terror that follows the abortive revolution of 1905, and finally succumb to disillusionment and despair. These insurgents enter the scene aflame with idealized zeal. Having freed themselves from the dead hand of their medieval environment, they eagerly and recklessly embrace the task of liberating an entire empire from the autocratic czar. Their enthusiasm is intensified by the belief that in fighting for a socialistic Russia they are simultaneously coping with the oppression of their own people. Willingly they sacrifice their immediate careers; gladly they endanger their freedom and even their lives. However, the cruel mockery of a worthless constitution capped by brutal pogroms struck these idealistic rebels a mortal blow. For a long time thereafter they lacked the courage to begin again, and many sought forgetfulness in the moral lassitude described so aptly in Artzibaschev's *Sanin.* Here, too, Asch was more assiduous than imaginative in his efforts to paint the revolutionary scene. He was too affected emotionally by the events to depict them with esthetic objectivity. Village life and carnal eroticism are described with lyric intensity, but social strife is perceived with eyes blurred by sentiment. As a consequence the protagonists, vigorous and alive in their personal intimacies and individual actions, tend to become nebulous and unreal when exploited as social symbols.

Our Faith, The League of the Week, and *Prestige,* all dealing with the contemporary social scene, are dramatic efforts in a minor key. The first is straight melodrama, concerned not so much with the spiritual consequences of miscegenation as with the not uncommon phenomenon of love

triumphing over prejudice. In the second play a deceived husband drinks himself to sleep and dreams of uniting all the weak and the poor and the rejected into an irresistible league headed by himself and the woman whose husband is his wife's paramour. While the fantastic action is developed with poignant power, the drama as a whole lacks the adroitness and motivation of Andreyev's models. *Prestige* possesses the semblance but not the dramatic delicacy of *The Cherry Orchard.* Here, too, the listlessness and effete gentility of an impoverished but proud bourgeois family are contrasted with the vigor and vulgarity of the erstwhile menials; but where Tcheckov achieved a mood of genuine pathos, Asch evokes only bathos.

3.

The God of Vengeance, originally produced in 1907, soon spread Asch's fame across the European continent. This play and *Mottke the Thief,* written in New York a decade later, are so similar in subject matter and treatment that they are best considered together. In both the protagonist is a successful procurer who suddenly is stricken by a strident conscience; in both the characters are of earthy stuff but fouled by the noisome slum. While Asch's first stories accentuated the idyllic aspects of Jewish life, these two works depict the plague of prostitution which for a time infected the ghetto environs. The Jew in him was strongly perturbed by the sight of Jewish procurers and prostitutes; his artistic eye revelled in the lustiness and voluptuous abandon of these reprobates. As a result both books are conceived didactically and expressed with realistic gusto.

The theme of *The God of Vengeance* is essentially spurious drama. The action revolves about the procurer Yekel's attempt to strike a bargain with Jehovah for the moral purity of his daughter Rivkele. There could be no trial of strength between such obviously disparate protagonists. Yekel might legitimately be pitted against the vengeful Jehovah, who visits the sins of the father upon the third and fourth generations, only if he had appeared on the stage as Asch had initially conceived him: a scoffer at God's laws and a hardened procurer. The Yekel we actually see, however, is a sordid yet superstitious owner of a brothel, sudden-

ly terrified by the discovery that his only daughter is following in the footsteps of her parents. Prodded by his guilty conscience, he attempts to enlist God's help by the purchase of a Torah. When the bribe is of no avail and Rivkele yields to temptation, Yekel rants hysterically against Jehovah's vengefulness.

Yekel fails to become a tragic figure because his destruction is abetted by Asch the moralist. In life Yekel, eager to save his daughter from the influence of the brothel, would either have sent her to some distant place where she would have remained unaffected by his immoral environment or he would have abandoned his bawdyhouse altogether and given her a respectable home. If, after he had done his best to bring her up properly, Rivkele had nevertheless taken the path of her mother, Yekel's frustration would have assumed a tragic aspect. Asch, however, compels Yekel to perform the impossible task of preserving Rivkele's innocence while keeping her over his own brothel and within the very reach of temptation. No intervention from a stern Jehovah was required to bring about the obvious consequences. Moreover, in view of the preceding action, Yekel's bombast in the last act sounds hollow and sentimental — as if spoken not by a man in deep anguish but by a character in a brash melodrama.

The popularity of the play was due largely to the novelty of scene and the realistic dialogue. The portrayal of brothel life is vigorous and effective, and the Lesbian affection between Manka and Rivkele is intimated with poetic reticence. Equally appealing is the symbolic emphasis on the disparity between the weakness of the flesh as displayed on the nether floor and the presumed spiritual striving in the apartment above.

Mottke the Thief, originally published as a novel and later dramatized into a popular play, is a work of superior merit. Here Asch contrasts the simple and static life of the village with the gaudy and grimy existence of the city slum. The first half of the book is written with inspired gusto. The character of the youthful Mottke is drawn with Rabelaisian lavishness. Red Zlatke, Blind Layb, Blind Pearl, Burek the trick dog, the acrobatic troupe, and numerous others are delineated with realistic clarity. The strong elemental attach-

ment between Mottke and his harassed mother is depicted with rare tenderness and insight.

Mottke's youth is evoked with gargantuan vividness. Born amidst abject poverty, he is no sooner able to creep than he steals the food belonging to a nearby little girl. Dire circumstances and sheer neglect quickly teach him to depend upon his animal impulses for guidance and to ignore the gratuitous advice of his elders. He has no ethical scruples, no squeamishness of conscience. Life is to him a scramble for food and shelter — a matter of overcoming opposition, of getting as much as possible of what he needs and wants — and he grows up like a stray mongrel, only with great cunning and insistency. He is beaten at will by his father, his teacher, his master, the village constable. When resistance is futile he accepts punishment without a whimper; but he bides his time, forgets nothing, and avenges himself upon his enemies the first chance he gets. At the age of thirteen he is fully grown and decides to leave the town which had always been hostile to him. He meets with a troupe of vagabond vaudevillians and is befriended by them. His strength, endurance, and gameness in time win him the affection of Marie the rope dancer and the jealousy of Kanarik the pander. When he can see no other way out, he kills his rival and elopes with Marie to Warsaw.

In the Polish metropolis Mottke appears to have acquired Kanarik's personality along with his passport. His elementally normal and therefore appealing traits become lost in the crass and conceited behavior of the successful pimp. One day, however, he falls in love with a virtuous girl and is suddenly converted. His subsequent action calls to mind that of Yekel: chastity becomes to him the symbol of the greatest good. He woos the demure Chanele with accentuated sentimentality. To make himself worthy of her he proceeds to sell his "girls," to break with his companions, and to engage in honest work. The metamorphosis lacks conviction, however. It is simply incredible that the unscrupulous thief and cunning criminal of the earlier pages should have become transformed into a virtuous and simple swain by the mere allure of a pretty face. Even less probable is his reckless credence in those whom he had every reason to suspect; and when his gullibility brings him into

the hand of the police, one cannot but wonder if he and Kanarik's murderer are one and the same person.

It is evident that while Mottke's early environment is described with the gusto and sympathy of the artist, his life in Warsaw is delineated with the pointedness of the moralist. The distressing traffic in prostitutes, which at the time was a grievous public plague, is treated with sociological animus — as if Asch wanted to do his share in disclosing and uprooting this shameful evil. This didactic attitude appears passive and casual, however, when compared with the moralizing in *The God of Vengeance,* and tends to be eclipsed in the reader's memory by the graphic reality of the greater part of the book.

While problems of the day have always commanded Sholem Asch's attention, he returned again and again to the study of individual emotional behavior. *Jephthah's Daughter, Amnon and Tamar, Shabbati Zevi,* and *Joseph,* written at long intervals, deal with different aspects of eroticism. The setting of the first play is laid in the days when men lived in caves and gods stalked the earth in human guise. The region inhabited by Jephthah is ruled by Moloch, and to him belongs every firstborn. The Hebrew chieftain, however, refuses to acknowledge Moloch's supremacy or to give him his eldest child, and the action is concerned with the god's victory over the bellicose eccentric. Jephthah's daughter is lured to her doom by Moloch's rays, and she goes to the pyre willingly in the belief that she belongs to him. While this anthropological interpretation of the biblical incident results in feeble drama, it affords Asch the opportunity of interweaving poetically the sexual and superstitious characteristics of primitive man.

In both *Amnon and Tamar* and *Shabbati Zevi* this eroticism emerges in its oriental exuberance, and in both sexual exultation is made the cause of eventual disaster. Amnon, King David's firstborn, follows love and war with the ardor, if not with the sagacity, of his famous father. When he falls a victim to his sister's charms, he stops at nothing to satisfy his lust. As Tamar is equally infatuated with him, she accepts with alacrity her father's suggestion that she visit her eldest brother. With their passion about to be consummated, the fiddles announce the approach of

battle. Amnon is up at once, eager to lead his company, and when Tamar attempts to stay him he scorns her as a worthless female. For many months thereafter Tamar lives secluded and spiritless in the house of her brother Absalom. When she shows herself at the latter's feast of the sheep-shearing, to which Amnon had been ominously invited, it was only to avenge herself by a double murder.

In *Shabbati Zevi* the protagonist, after prolonged fasting and prayer, comes to believe that he is the long-awaited Messiah. He performs the symbolic marriage ceremony with the holy Torah, and announces his divine mission. Thousands of Jews flock to his side and revere him as God's annointed. Unknown to him, a young Jewess in Poland, named Sarah, is simultaneously proclaiming him as the true Messiah and her fated helpmate. By the time she reaches him her following exceeds his. Shabbati Zevi welcomes her as his prophetess but informs her that he is already wedded to the Torah. Sarah refuses to be put off and insists she is his God-appointed wife. Convinced of her strong hold on the people and affected by her passion, he agrees to the marriage — only to lose God's favor and suffer complete ignominy.

Joseph: A Shepherd Story in Five Scenes is a pastoral drama based upon the affection of Potiphar's lecherous wife for the continent Hebrew youth. It deals eloquently with Joseph's entry into Egypt, his extraordinary beauty, his remarkable piety and wisdom, and the chaste firmness with which he resists the passionate overtures of his mistress and her enamored slaves.

These plays are characterized by the erotic spirit of *Song of Songs.* With each work developing a familiar incident, Asch concentrated on the different ways in which man expresses his irresistible carnality. The ornate dialogue is suited to the action, and the biblical directness glosses over the sentimental passages.

5.

Sholem Asch migrated to the United States in 1914 to avoid the horror and the heartache of the World War, and although he has at various times sojourned in Europe, he now is an American citizen and lives in New York. During the past twenty-five years he has been a regular contributor to *The Forward,* the largest Yiddish newspaper in the world,

and all his writings, with the exception of *The Nazarene,* have since then appeared serially in its literary section.

The life of the teeming streets of the East Side could not but stimulate his fertile imagination. He was especially affected by the pathetic efforts of the Jewish immigrants to adapt themselves to American ways and practices. All his sympathy notwithstanding, he tended to be repelled by the crassness and vulgarity of their new mode of life. Before long his impressions began to manifest themselves in his stories of American Jews. During the years 1917-1924 he published *Uncle Moses, Chaim Lederer's Return, Judge Not* — and *The Mother.* To this group must be added *God's Prisoners,* which appeared in 1933.

"Uncle" Moses is already an elderly manufacturer of men's clothing when persecution in his native Polish village forces its Jewish inhabitants to seek asylum in this country. He welcomes his poor townsmen with the readiness of a magnanimous provider: all are given work in his sweatshop, and all their affairs are managed with his advice and assistance. When Mascha, the pretty child of one of his employees, attracts his fancy, he decides to make her his wife at the earliest opportunity. The girl grows up to despise him, but is forced to marry him nevertheless. However, his doting passion, especially after Mascha becomes a mother, gradually robs him of all force and self-assertion, and in the end he even loses control of his factory.

Uncle Moses begs comparison with *Wealthy Reb Shlome.* The people in both stories have a similar rustic origin, and in each the interest is centered in the potent leader of the communal group. The balance is heavily in favor of the older work. In writing of these Jews in their patriarchal setting — Jews who were ready to defend their faith with their very lives and who endured the week for the pleasure of the Sabbath — Asch could not but wax idyllic and make his words glow with lyric gusto. When he came, however, to portray the drab and dreary existence of the sweatshop immigrants — to whom the bliss of the Sabbath had become a troubled memory, whose religious orthodoxy was being devitalized by the vulgarities of a levelling freedom, and whose weary minds were of necessity engrossed in the

economics of the factory — he could only write with the bluntness of uninspired irony.

The protagonist of *Chaim Lederer's Return* is possessed of a finer mind and greater drive than Uncle Moses. Unencumbered by the latter's lustfulness and having reached the ripe age of sixty years, Lederer decides to retire from his successful shirt factory in order to return to the things of the spirit which he had abandoned in his youth for the lure of riches and security. But he soon discovers that his early ideals have slipped from him beyond recovery. Reflection reveals to him the mockery of his career: for years on end his thoughts had been so monopolized by shirts and the profits from making more and more shirts that he was no longer fit for anything else. "What hurt him most of all was to see that the life that was led in his own home seemed strange and offensive to him . . . That worried him, taunted him, tortured him." His increasingly morbid attempts to recapture the past only alienate his family the more and increase the torment of his futile existence. Finally he decides to give up his wealth, to flee from his bourgeois environment, and to seek the bliss of obscurity as a worker in some remote factory.

In this short novel Asch is at his best as a writer of Jewish life in America. His incisive analysis of the impelling drive for economic security, which had turned Lederer into a money-making machine, cannot but strike the reader with the force of its cogency. Equally acute is the satirical portrayal of Lederer's children, who are so steeped in the hypocrisy of bourgeois respectability that they are not even aware of the ideal of "the common good" which had once inspired their father and which returned to trouble him in his old age. The book is most of all a study of the state of mind of a man chained to the habits of a lifetime and straining in vain to be free. And if the lesser characters lack the roundness and richness of deep insight, they possess the sharpness and shallowness that is their due.

In *Judge Not* — Max Stone, a successful banker, meets by chance with an old Kentucky colonel (an Iowa realtor in the English translation) and his beautiful mistress who have come to New York on a spree. The woman's ingratiating charm attracts him and he soon yields to her overt

advances. During the night the old man discovers the couple in Stone's room and dies accidentally in the scuffle that ensues. The banker is arrested for murder and subsequently sentenced to die in the electric chair. His lawyers and friends, aware of his wife's unfaithfulness and eager to make use of it in an appeal for a new trial, plead with him for his approval. But he refuses. Sojourn in prison has changed the grasping and lustful banker into a friendly and forgiving stoic. For the first time taking stock of his past life, he comes to realize the futility of his rapacious career and the essential justice of the verdict of a crass and callow jury. With his wife refusing to help him, life loses its allure and he spends his last days seeking clemency for his fellow convicts and cogitating the inexorable nature of the eternal verities.

While the narrative is developed with literary skill and while the ironic exposition of formal justice is, in small compass, as effective as that in Dreiser's *An American Tragedy,* the story as a whole suffers from a basic fallacy. For Stone's conversion is as little warranted by the facts of human conduct as the change of character in Yekel and Mottke. Rich and influential, in the prime of life, about to attain the pinnacle of financial success, he is hardly the man to permit a chance circumstance to send him to the electric chair. Nor is he likely to succumb to remorse so completely as to choose death rather than expose the infidelity of a wife whom he has long ceased to love. Here, as elsewhere, Asch has forced his protagonist to act in accord not so much with his own inner nature as with the dictates of the orthodox moral code.

The Mother is a loosely told story. The first half deals with the vicissitudes of the Zlotnik family as it leaves its native Poland and seeks to establish itself in the strangeness and squalor of New York's East Side; the second half is concerned with Buchholz's struggle for artistic recognition. The two parts are truly dichotomous, without inherent interrelation. Nor are the main characters clearly conceived. Sarah Rivke lacks the earthy reality of Asch's other mothers despite the wonders she achieves with her "magic pots"; by accentuating not so much her unique personal qualities as her instinctive motherliness, he has inevitably attenuated her essential appeal. Even more negative is her daughter

Deborah, to whom Asch also ascribes a "secret mission" of motherhood, and whose behavior is too passive to be entirely credible. Even the towering, uncouth Buchholz, to whom modeling is as natural and vital as breathing, acts too much the clown to rise above his eccentricity. What saves the book from complete mediocrity is the deep sympathy which quickens the chapters dealing with the tribulations of the immigrant family seeking a foothold in their new home.

These novels of American Jewish life were written for the most part during Asch's first years in New York. He had not yet penetrated to the heart of his material; again and again he gives evidence of having perceived the activity of those about him not so much with the insight of the artist as with the curiosity of the newcomer. The excrescences of our complex culture, especially as they attached themselves to the immigrant Jews, affected him with an oppressive ominousness. Moreover, he could not wait until the subjects for his stories had passed through the crucible of his imagination: their weekly installments had to appear in *The Forward* with inescapable regularity. As a consequence his fiction of this period could not but suffer by comparison with either the narratives of his first youthful exuberance or his later masterly novels.

The force of this criticism is accentuated by an examination of *God's Prisoners,* which was written immediately after *Three Cities* and is not yet published in English. The artistic superiority of this sensitive study of eccentric love is readily obvious. After living for nearly twenty years with a man she despises, Emily Brown breaks away from her home and grown daughter and goes to France to live her own life. At the Riviera she meets Frank Melbourne and is immediately attracted to him. The latter, though ten years her junior, is also fascinated by her, and the two are soon inseparable. Both are intoxicated by their new-found love, and profess it to each other with intense affection. Yet Emily cannot consummate her overpowering desire for Frank. Her "cursedly loyal nature" keeps her from giving herself to him; the "smell of a strange male" in him frightens her away. Terribly distressed by her inexplicable reaction, she confesses that unshakable ties of the past hold her back much against her will. "Aren't we like prisoners," she

questions pathetically, "forged with unbreakable chains to our time and our inescapable environment? . . . " After months of self-torture and even an attempt at suicide she decides to return home and leaves for America before Frank can stop her.

If this love story is not only not preposterous but pathetically real, it is so by virtue of the deep tenderness which lifts it out of the vulgar commonplace. Its aspect of mystic insight gives it a reality surpassing our external senses. Knowing Emily's austere and conventional Jewish background, we can well sympathize with her inability to ignore a morality which her intellect denies. She could no more overcome the "smell of a strange male" in Frank than she could help falling in love with him at first sight. Nor is one wholly surprised to find Frank accepting her recoil with complete understanding. He comes of Puritanical stock, and has reached his twenty-eighth year without meeting a woman worthy of his love. Emily has unlocked his heart and revealed to him a new and delightful existence. His deep affection for her enables him to perceive the mystical ties which inhibit her: he accepts her rebuff as a natural act — as if she were his dear mother as well as his unresponsive mistress . . . Nor does he misconstrue the note Emily leaves behind: " . . . I am not only your beloved; I am your mother who gave you birth. For that reason I am leaving you — because I am afraid I might weaken and kill our love . . . "

The novel would have been even more effective if it were more concentrated in treatment. Much more is given of the background of the two lovers than is needed for the appreciation of their peculiar passion. Also, Frank talks too much and too philosophically, and only impedes the accelerated flow of the narrative. The love episode itself, however, is developed with such sincerity of tone and delicacy of feeling that it becomes one of the distinguished stories of our time.

6.

The persecution and pogroms in Eastern Europe during the World War and immediately after disrupted a large part of the Jewish community. Thousands were butchered by the warring armies, and tens of thousands were made homeless and desolate. Asch was profoundly perturbed by the acute

suffering of the innocent victims. With characteristic fervor he helped gather funds for their relief and excoriated their oppressors in newspaper articles. In addition he sought to give courage to his dispirited readers by depicting earlier calamities which were turned into spiritual victories by faith and perseverance.

In *Marranos,* a dramatic sketch, Spaniards and Portuguese of Jewish origin continue to adhere secretly to the faith of their fathers and finally renounce their wealth and social position for the religious tolerance of the Netherlands. Safe on Dutch soil, they are at first exceedingly disappointed to find the native Jews a meek and humble lot. But the sagacious rabbi soon persuades them that the Jewish God is not the haughty Lord of the Inquisition but the God of love and peace. The clashing points of view are presented with terseness and vigor.

The Enchantress of Castile describes the distress of the Jews in Rome during the reign of Pope Paul IV. The Inquisition is then all-powerful, and its leaders are bent on converting the Jews to Christianity. When the latter, stiff-necked in their piety, refuse to undergo baptism, they are condemned to perish by drowning within the ghetto walls. Miraculously however, succor comes in the person of the beautiful Jewess whose resemblance to the Virgin appears so real to the onlooking Romans that they think her Mary in the flesh sharing the misery of the wretched unbelievers. In writing this novel Asch could not always remember his original purpose. Sixteenth-century Rome is painted with zest and the effect of Jeptha's comeliness, first upon the enamored artist and later upon the credulous populace, is told with a joyous spirit. As a consequence the point of the story — while faith abides within the heart none need despair — receives less emphasis than the beauty of the model and the grandeur of the Eternal City.

Jewish life in Poland during the bloody campaign of Bodgan Chmelnitski and his kossack hordes is made the subject of *The Sanctification of the Name.* The Jews were then, as at the close of the World War, on the brink of annihilation; and Asch implies that now, as then, their undying faith will keep them from destruction. The atmosphere of rustic

simplicity of his early writing pervades many pages of this book as well. Only here the emphasis is not so much on village life in the eighteenth century as on a Jewish village in distress; yet not so much on Jews in danger as on Jews combatting danger with implicit faith. This didactic intent does not, however, mar the effect of Asch's lyric intensity; and his compassionate brooding gives the story the glowing quality of imaginative truth — even if the setting itself lacks historic verity.

Jewish persecution during the late war is treated in the play, *A String of Pearls.* A troop of Russian soldiers enter a Polish town and order the Jews to evacuate it within twelve hours — all but the rabbi's attractive daughter whom the commanding officer wants for his pleasure. At the advice of her pious father the girl dresses herself in the clothes of her dead grandmother, including the latter's pearl necklace with the secret poignard. When the orderly comes to fetch her, he finds a gray-haired and wrinkled old woman . . . The injection of the miraculous into a realistic treatment of present-day conditions gives the action a somewhat maudlin aspect. While in *The Enchantress of Castile* one does not doubt that the Roman Jews were ready to die rather than embrace Christianity, and the miracle of Jeptha's beauty appears the more probable because of the superstition of the voluptuous populace, the anomaly of the pearl necklace, even when viewed symbolically, is sufficiently forced and sentimental in its modern setting to strain the credulity of the most sympathetic reader. And the final scene, in which the Jews are urged to purify their spirit and deepen their faith, is a loose appendage of melodramatic byplay.

Pertinent to this group is Asch's brief novel, *The Song of the Valley,* in which Jewish striving for redemption is realized on the inert and swampy plains of Palestine. No title was ever more apt. The song of the Chalutzim — the Hebrew cry, "Long live Israel!" chanted over and over and with increasing intensity — resounds through the pages of this nationalistic idyl. Shortly after the World War a group of young East European Jews, of diverse origin and dissimilar development but united in their glowing zeal to rejuvenate the land of their forefathers, undertake to reclaim the infested swampland on the outskirts of Nazareth. City-

bred, inexperienced, without shelter, adequate tools, or sufficient food, these inspired pioneers undergo many disastrous hardships. The native Arabs scoff at their insane persistence; insects and malaria and the rains torment their bodies and sap their strength. But their indomitable will to succeed overcomes all obstacles, and within the short span of a season they show a rewarding crop — and the promise of permanent settlement. Writing the book in the shadow of Hitler's increasing ruthlessness, Asch tended to accentuate the courage and the heroism of the Zionistic youths who came to Palestine to establish the foundations of a Jewish homeland in the Land of Israel. Every one of the seventy pioneers is eager to risk his life for the success of the colony. They meet each hardship with a song and assume the onerous tasks with the enthusiasm of fanatics. For the vision of a thriving Jewish Palestine — an asylum for the oppressed and persecuted of their people — is ever before them: a land once again flowing with milk and honey, once more a beacon of spiritual light for all mankind. This vision and what these dreamers do to realize it are described with the idyllic simplicity of Asch at his best.

Three Cities, published in 1933, quickly established itself as a novel of high merit. It was translated into numerous languages, and reviewers everywhere received it with generous acclaim. In this country and in Great Britain it was the first of Asch's books to become a "best seller"; with the result that he was added to the distinguished foreign writers whose work appears regularly in English translation.

The book depicts three significant periods in the Russian drama which ended with the triumph of the Bolshevik leaders. *Petersburg* describes the commercial and industrial expansion which took place in Russia at the turn of the present century, with the rich Jews exerting themselves to the utmost to stimulate this economic development and to gain from it the wealth which afforded them personal security and individual recognition. *Warsaw* presents a sympathetic view of the social unrest and political crisis just prior to the World War, especially as they affected the poor Polish Jews who were harassed by harsh officials and starved by economic restrictions. *Moscow* gives the liberal's analysis of the social forces released by the 1917 Revolution

and of the acute conflict between the individuals who seek to remain free and party discipline which demands blind loyalty.

Asch is here as much the social historian as the imaginative novelist. He is at pains to emphasize the corruption and ineptitude of government officials, the stupid extravagance of the rich, the squalor and dissatisfaction of the poor, the fanatic zeal of the revolutionists — all the elements of national decay and turmoil which, aggravated by the devastating World War, hastened the destruction of the vast Romanov Empire. At the same time he is eager to make clear the role played by his own people in this epic drama, and therefore centers the action in their midst. In the first part he concentrates on the rich, energetic Jews who gained their wealth by exploiting the practically virgin resources of the land; who live ostentatiously and yet curry the favor of corrupt and antisemitic officials; who pose as cosmopolitans and idealists and yet remain to the end earnest defenders of the haute bourgeoisie. Because these people and their mode of living are essentially distasteful to him, Asch has drawn them with the flatness and futility of the pedestrian painter. They are recognizable likenesses; they talk and behave with external similitude; but even Gabriel Mirkin, the most sympathetic character, lacks depth and variegation. *Warsaw* is devoted to the poor Jews who are deprived of human rights, herded together in dank and dilapidated slums, harassed during the day and hounded at night, forced to live in a continuous state of semi-starvation; who are born in dread and who learn early to hate their oppressors and to work for the social revolution. Here Asch is supreme, since nothing moves him so deeply as the suffering of the poor. In concentrating on the Hurvitz family and their satellites — who cram their minds with intellectual fare, guide the less fortunate to a new way of life, conspire against the Czar, and dream of a new and better world — Asch quivers with the excitement of artistic intensity. Both groups meet in the final part of the trilogy after the Revolution. Their roles are now reversed — and so are Asch's sympathies. The former outcasts, now triumphant and vindictive, evoke in him only anger and aversion. He resents the chaotic conditions which give bullies and fanatics full sway and which stamp as

weaklings and renegades those who cannot subject their scruples to the iron will of their dogmatic leaders. As a consequence the revolutionists in *Moscow* lack even the two-dimensional reality possessed by their bourgeois victims.

Zachary Mirkin, about whom the story revolves and who bridges the gulf between the antagonistic groups, emerges a pale and passive creation. He fits more the negatively speculative milieu of the nineteenth-century Russian novel than the dynamic setting of contemporary crisis. The only son of a rich industrialist, hypersensitive and sentimental, he reaches manhood burdened with a mother complex. He becomes engaged to a beautiful girl chiefly because of his affection for her handsome mother. Unable to cope with the pervese situation and lacking the courage to carry out his plan of suicide, he flees from home and his betrothed and seeks to begin life anew in the obscurity of a Warsaw slum. Having met Mrs. Hurvitz casually in Petersburg, he at once attaches himself to her and is mothered by her to his heart's content. He refuses to accept his father's help when he learns that the latter and his betrothed have become man and wife, and suffers the same privation as his penniless neighbors. Now certain of his lifework, he becomes engaged to Mrs. Hurvitz's elder daughter and joins the revolutionary party. October 1917 finds him in Moscow fighting with the Bolshevik workers for the control of the city. Soon after the communists gain power, however, he becomes troubled by their lack of scruple and needless cruelty. When his father's sincere efforts to serve the new rulers are rewarded with imprisonment and when his own desperate attempts to save him from certain death are met with snubs and sneers, he again flees to Warsaw — which in the meantime has become the capital of the new Poland.

In making Zachary Mirkin the protagonist of *Three Cities*, Asch has failed to give the book the positive union of actor and action inherent in every great work of art. In a novel of profound social crisis the main character must possess the dynamic inner drive which enables him either to ride the crest of the forces unharnessed by the cataclysm or to stand up against his explosive environment and be destroyed by it. But Zachary is a weak and worried young man. He can neither accept nor fight the life about him.

Self-centered and lonely, he complains to Mrs. Hurvitz: "I've nobody, nobody in the whole world. I'm so wretched." He seems incapable of positive action, and seeks release in brooding and talk. When he tries to merge his lot with that of the poor, his passivity makes him only the shadow of a shadow; having neither the means to help them nor the strength to take up their battle, he only clings to Mrs. Hurvitz's apron strings and bemoans his sad plight. Although the explosion of the October Revolution lifts him to the top of a barricade, he quickly relapses into the confused soul-searching which leads to flight. One needs only to think of Gorki's Clim Samghin, also a passive but decidedly positive participant in the Russian revolutionary movement, to understand why Zachary failed to become fully alive.

That *Three Cities* remains nevertheless a work of distinguished fiction is due to the vivid delineation of a crucial contemporary scene, to the realistic portrayal of the Warsaw and Lodz poor, to the lyric passages which suffuse the book with beauty, and chiefly to the brooding sympathy which encompasses the action and gives it a deep and driving significance.

8.

The War Goes On, written several years later, may be regarded as a sequel to *Three Cities.* It follows the latter book chronologically, and pursues the story of social upheaval from the savage civil strife on the Russian border shortly after the Revolution to the economic and spiritual collapse of postwar Germany during the period of inflation. This novel, too, is not without fault: the gratuitous early chapters add very little to the development of the main theme; Aron Yudkewitch's undue prominence deprives Hans Bodenheimer of his rightful place as the chief protagonist; the portraits of several prominent characters appear flat and flaccid. Nevertheless the book towers as a work of contemporary fiction. No other novelist has depicted with such clarity and acuteness the suffering, the pathos, the chaos, and most of all the unmitigating despair which combined during the years of inflation to spawn the present rulers of Germany. Again and again the narrative flames forth with the passionate anger of the proud Jew; it emanates even more

from the artist's wistful and compassionate insight into human vicissitude.

Foremost among the incidental characters is Aron Yudkewitch, an extraordinarily clever *luftmensch.* We watch him escaping from his native village when it falls into the hands of the Bolshevik army, settling in Germany with the woman he bought and married, and rapidly forcing his way to the control of the large Bodenheimer bank. All his fabulous wealth, however, which he loses with the end of the inflation, is as ashes in his mouth because his pretty wife despises him for his impotency and because Asch never permits him to forget that his life is a fraud and a mockery.

Yudkewitch is after all the interloper, the despised insect who feeds upon a diseased body until squashed at the first opportunity. More central are the Bodenheimers, the von Stickers, and the Spinners — in whom the tragedy of Germany is concentrated. Max Bodenheimer, the dignified head of a Jewish banking family, shoots himself with his army revolver when the inflation makes it impossible for him to preserve the good name of the bank established by his grandfather and made powerful by his imperious father. His brother Heinrich is the selfish genius of the family. An outstanding publicist, he devotes his brilliant pen to the enhancement of the theory of Nordic superiority — until tragedy forces upon him the truth which he has all his life tried so eloquently to deny. Adolf, the youngest brother, is interested in neither business nor politics and gives himself wholly to the collecting and enjoyment of works of modern art; in the end he too is forced to sacrifice his precious paintings in order to feed "two living masterpieces." Hans, Max's only son, is the most pathetic and best-drawn of the Bodenheimers. As a child his parents had him baptized in the hope of sparing him the ignominy of being a Jew. Yet he suffers most of all for his non-"Aryan" origin. Nothing can compensate for his "inferior" blood — not his wealth nor his German appearance nor his Christianity. He and his like are broken on the rack of blind, brutal hatred; a hatred born of shame and hunger and giving power and prestige to "Death's Prophet" — the "Golem set in motion by an inner mechanism . . . a machine created to give out vibrations of hatred, nothing else."

The tragedy of the Germans is given equal significance. When the elderly Robert von Sticker, a Goethe scholar completely impoverished by the inflation, learns that his daughter is in love with the son of his Jewish banker, he drives her out of the house with Junker ruthlessness; and when his money is about to give out the proud Prussian, neither willing nor able to share in the shame of his people, arranges for his funeral and sends a bullet through his brain. His son Wolfgang, brutalized by the war and postwar years of bloody chaos, becomes a Nazi gangster and later shoots his sister when she refuses to give up the unborn child of her half-Jewish lover. Only Lotte von Stricker has come through the years of deprivation and confusion with a clear eye and brave heart. When she meets Hans and falls in love with him, she does not trouble to inquire into his antecedents but gives herself to him with joyous eagerness. Her warm, unwarped spirit emerges in sharp contrast with the rigid austerity of her parents and the brutishness of her bigoted brother. Albert Spinner completes the picture. An honest worker and loyal Social Democrat, he is forced by prolonged undernourishment to lend a willing ear to the Nazi promises of shared wealth and national greatness.

The significance of the book lies not so much in the artistic development of the Bodenheimers and the von Strickers as in the German catastrophe which made their stories possible. Asch is at his keenest in describing the epic pathos of a haughty people driven mad by defeat. He makes painfully clear the terrible postwar conditions which forced the disciplined Prussians, increasingly perplexed and truculent, to nurse delusions of grandeur, to make the Jewish minority their ready scapegoat, to fall like overripe fruit into the lap of "Death's Prophet." At the same time he dissects and exposes the crooked roots of the hatred of which the Jews became the outraged victims. His objective and perspicacious treatment makes the indictment all the more crushing.

9.

The religion of the orthodox Jew, which kept him bound to a medieval way of life until our own time, has occupied Asch's imagination from the beginning. In his first writings his description of Jewish piety is kindled by a naive enthusiasm; in much of his later work the praise of orthodoxy

winds its way through the narrative with the tenderness of a lyric motif. In *Salvation,* published in 1934, this glorification of faith is expressed beautifully and profoundly in the story of the simple-minded boy who in time reaches the pinnacles of saintliness by following the dictates of his pure heart and by loving God with all his being.

Jechiel, born in an atmosphere of intense chassidic piety of a century ago, cleaves to God from his earliest years. From childhood, also, "his heart was barred against all that was complicated or distorted." When, as a young boy, his mind fails to grasp the intricate reasoning of the Talmud and his pious father disapproves of him, he suffers grievously. At the age of ten he is compelled to leave school in order to assist his sick mother, and a feeling of doom overcomes him at the thought of no longer being able to give his full time to study. Yet he persists in loving God and in trying to serve Him faithfully. One day a strange old man, learning of the boy's plight, assures him that psalms are as acceptable to God as the most abstruse lore, and advises him to recite them at every opportunity. Jechiel does so, and with such devotion and enthusiasm that he soon attracts the favorable attention of his elders. Almost as strong as his attachment to Jehovah was his quickened sympathy for all living things, having "a gift of entering into the feelings of others and completely identifying himself with them." All his life he was ready to give the little that was his to those who had less, and often shared his bread with the village fool and the stray beggar.

In time his saintliness became apparent to the simple folk, and they began to crowd about him daily to partake with him in the recital of psalms and to seek his advice and assistance. Once, to obtain a draft animal for a poor peddler, Jechiel assures a wealthy horse dealer that for that good deed God would fertilize his wife's barren womb within a year. Realizing at once that he has pledged His name presumptuously, he is terribly distressed. When his own young wife dies in labor soon after, he takes it as a sign of God's anger and begins to expiate his grievous sin by assuming the ordeal of a wandering beggar. After many months of severe self-chastisement he is discovered by a disciple and told that the horse dealer's wife had given birth to a girl and that the

townspeople revere him more than ever. At the man's insistence Jechiel returns to assume his destined role as teacher and adviser. The book concludes with the story of his successful attempt, eighteen years later, to save the soul of the horse dealer's daughter who had fallen in love with a Christian youth and had run away to a nunnery to be baptized. For days the villagers are in a state of fearful turmoil. All attempts to rescue the girl fail, and the neighboring Poles are determined to celebrate her apostasy as a great victory over the Jews. Before the appointed time, however, the conscience-stricken girl throws herself from a window to her death, and all the people recognize in her desperate act the efficacy of the holy rabbi's prayer.

Like all of Asch's works, *Salvation* contains more than the mere story; as important as the portrayal of Jechiel's saintliness is the analysis of the essential tenets of chassidism. In this respect the book might be compared to Opatoshu's *In Polish Woods,* which was written about fifteen years earlier and digs deeper into the psychological origins of the sect. The renowned Rabbi Mendele of Kotsk, in both volumes the spiritual leader of chassidism, appears more fully realized and more understandable in Opatoshu's work. Moreover, while in *Salvation* Jewish life is treated as a thing apart, unaffected by its surrounding background or by the exciting secular ideas which were then beginning to stir the younger generation, Opatoshu took great pains to place the chassidic movement in its complete European setting and to make clear the reasons for its incipient decline.

If *Salvation* is nonetheless the greater work of art, it is because Asch is the more gifted novelist. The lyric beauty of his prose imbues the narrative with artistic authenticity. Like Jechiel he can enter more directly into the feelings of others: his delineation of the piety and mystical aspirations of commonplace Jews is as vivid and veracious as if he were describing his own deepest emotions. Their pathetic and even pathological behavior assumes inherent reality in their intense yearning for spiritual beatitude. Thus, when Jechiel's father decides to leave his wife and children to their fate in order to work within the courtyard of his revered rabbi for the final redemption of Israel, we envisage his agonized soul too clearly not to commiserate with him or his

self-imposed mission. We only sympathize all the more with his deeply devoted wife who, admitting meekly her inferior position as a woman, accepts her role as provider and works herself to death in order that her menfolk may study for the greater glory of God. This implicit faith is throughout set off against the poverty and earthiness of the daily routine. The swollen sluices of village life flow at their fullest. The artisans and tradespeople jostle one another realistically in the turmoil of the marketplace. The bucolic scenes about the wayside inn, and especially the meeting at the stream between the buxom goose girl and the shy Jechiel, are alive with idyllic vivacity. Nor are sentiment and melodrama lacking to give the proper seasoning to this tender story of chassidic life a century ago.

The crowning beauty of the book remains, of course, the character and faith of the artless Jechiel. His goodness of heart encompassed all living creatures, and to give comfort to others was his constant preoccupation. Simpleminded himself, he came to believe that not intellect but faith leads to salvation: that the love of God ennobles man's spirit. He therefore cleaved to his Maker with all his soul and with all his might. In the psalms he found the key to all his yearnings, and their joyous recital opened to him the fountainhead of human existence. Man appeared to him a chip of God — a soul sojourning on earth but longing to unite with the Almighty. Hunger and suffering therefore touched him to the quick, and when he could not help his fellows he shared their adversity. In time the mere magic of his word gave bread to the hungry and comfort to the sick, and his name became synonymous with saintliness. And Asch, writing the book at the time of Hitler's accession to power, when the light of Israel again began to flicker, concludes the narrative with the pious hope that "each generation will see its own righteous man. For is it not written that the righteous man is the cornerstone of the world?"

Probably two million Americans will have read *The Nazarene* before the book disappears from the best-seller lists. This is an exceptional record for any novel, and particularly so for a traditional life of Jesus translated from the Yiddish and employing the timeworn devices of reincarnation

and secret apocryphal manuscripts. Yet the work was certain of acclaim. For the outstanding Jewish writer to treat the founder of Christianity with reverence and to accept him in the likeness of the Gospels was a novelty certain of appeal to many readers. Most of all, however, the extraordinary popularity of *The Nazarene* is a spontaneous compliment to an author who could take the most familiar story in the world and give it the freshness and fascination of an inspired narrative.

The story of Jesus, or Rabbi Yeshua ben Joseph, is retold in turn by Pan Vladomsky, in a former existence Cornelius, the efficient and worldly governor of Jerusalem under Pilate; in the secretly discovered gospel of Judas owned by Pan Vladomsky; and by a young Polish Jew who turns out to have been a contemporary of Cornelius and a sympathetic witness of the self-proclaimed Messiah's last tragic days in Jerusalem. The final portrait varies in no essential particular from the traditional likeness, except that it is more full-bodied and more clearly a part of the spiritual turmoil in which the Nazarene carpenter had his being. Jesus's goings and comings, preaching and healing, exhorting and denouncing, from his early soul-searching in the wilderness to his final crucifixion and burial, are here enlarged upon with the fervor of faith and with great evocative beauty.

The long narrative is quick with colorful scenes and significant protagonists of Pilate's Palestine. The oriental pomp and luxury within the court of the High Priest, little Salome's dance before Herod and her bloody reward, the jostle and bustle in the Temple courts at festival time, the squalor and misery of the Jerusalem poor, the pious earthiness of the Jewish peasants, the intellectual probing and mystical yearning of the scholarly seekers after the Messiah — these and other aspects of Palestinian life are described with lively authenticity and picturesque detail. With equal sympathy and understanding are depicted the scores of men and women who crowd the pages of the narrative and give it body and fictional beauty; Cornelius, Pilate, Rabbi Nicodemon and his pupil Jochanan, Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, Judas, and the other disciples being only the more important subjects for Asch's great skill at portraiture. In

their lives are reflected the sufferings and aspirations of the Jews under Rome's oppressive domination.

After prolonged study and reflection Sholem Asch chose to accept Jesus Christ as he appears in the Gospels. Only he has placed him fully and squarely within his native environment: an extremely sensitive youth who, infinitely more than his fellow Jews, felt so acutely the craving of his oppressed people for the advent of the Messiah that he in time convinced himself that God had called him to redeem them. As his mother has told Judas, "he sought the justice of God among men and found it not. And I perceived that with each injustice he loseth the blood of his heart." Influenced by a passing Nazarite, he took a vow "to go into the wilderness and inquire into the ways of God." When he returned after several years he already knew his mission. He soon forsook his carpenter's bench and began to preach, to succor the poor, to perform miracles. Disciples clove to him and spread his fame. He went from village to village, preaching and healing, ignoring those who mocked him and answering in parables those who questioned him.

Many learned and pious Jews, yearning for the Messiah and eager to greet his advent, sought for a sign from the new Rabbi; not receiving it, they refused to follow him. The eminent Rabbi Nicodemon came from Jerusalem to question him, but would not accept him. Much as he sympathized with Jesus's preaching, he could not but conclude — and thoughtful Jews have echoed it from Jesus's time on — that "the Rabbi's doctrine is good and great for those that are born without spirit, or for such as would deny the spirit. But we are born in the spirit and of the covenant which God made with Abraham — how shall *we* be born again without denying the spirit? . . . He has been appointed the prophet to the nations, according to the prophecies of former times, that he may open their eyes to the great light of the One God." So far as the Jews were concerned, groaning under Rome's heel and seeking for a redeemer, the advent of the Messiah was still in the offing.

When Jesus finally revealed himself to his disciples and proceeded to Jerusalem to exhort the populace, he openly courted apprehension and execution as a rebel and blasphemer. Here Asch indicates emphatically that the guilt lies with

Pilate and not with the Jews. For even the High Priest feared this strange and enigmatic Rabbi and would not molest him until forced by the Roman's imperative command. Moreover, with the exception of a few priests, the Jews sought to save the life of the condemned Rabbi and hoped to the last for a sign that would destroy their oppressor. In the words of young Jochanan, "We had thought that now, now, the measure of his suffering had been filled, now the salvation was at hand, now he would lift his head, and his enemies would be utterly destroyed. Our hunger had filled our hearts: Let it happen now! Let God's name be glorified! God's name must be glorified! But the moment had passed, the miracle had not burst upon us. There only stood before us a tormented and beaten Jew, and at his side his hangman, Pilate."

The Nazarene is essentially a sequel to *Salvation* in the sense that here Asch advances the glorification of the righteous man from the nether plane of the village saint to the universal heights of the saviour of mankind. He conceives Jesus not as a rebel and founder of a new religion but as a Jewish righteous man following in the path of the prophets before him and bringing faith to its ultimate goal. Stripped of the miracles ascribed to him, he differs little from Shabbati Zevi, and is blood brother to Jechiel and other chassidic rabbis. Indeed, over and over in reading *The Nazarene* one tends to forget that the subject is the founder of Christianity and anathema to the intensely pious Jews whom he so closely resembles. One cannot but wonder at the irony that Asch, so consciously Jewish and so familiar with the Nazarene's invidious place in Jewish history, should have chosen to retell the traditional story of Jesus in a manner to make him at once a prophet in Israel and the Christ of the Gentiles.

11.

A telescoping of Asch's numerous writings discloses certain definite characteristics. Simultaneously a pagan poet who sees things through the prism of earthly beauty and a passionate Jew who must cry out when his people are in pain, he again and again submits to his conscience — to the detriment of his sensuous imagination. His exhortation and faulty motivation are thus the consequence of an ethi-

cal compulsion rather than of a narrow didacticism. Much as the artist in him admires the robust reality of the rascal and the transgressor, his moral self insists on the triumph of virtue and the downfall of the wicked. Yekel and Mottke are made the victims not so much of their own wrongdoing as of their author's ethical code. Max Stone is sent to the electric chair not for the accidental killing of the old philanderer but for devoting his life to greed and lechery. Emily Brown is kept from consummating her love for Frank because she was not yet free of her marital bond. Yudkewitch is deprived of his wealth and power because he had acquired them at the expense of the poor and the unfortunate. These and other instances give evidence of Asch's tendency to keep the evildoers from triumphing over the righteous — even as he more than once invokes chance and the supernatural to confound the enemies of Israel.

If his moralizing occasionally interferes with the artistic motivation of his stories, he excels as a painter of sensuous beauty. He was the first Yiddish writer to proclaim Ceres' supremacy among the gods of men. For centuries the orthodox Jew regarded nature with medieval suspicion. The chassid's more favorable attitude toward it was only the indirect result of his pantheistic enthusiasm. Mendele, Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, and others who preceded Asch, having emancipated themselves from the medieval spirit of the ghetto and having come under the influence of the romantic literature of the time, did their best to instil a love of the sensuous world in their readers. In their attempt, however, to replace the obsolete *weltanschauung* of orthodox Judaism with one more in keeping with modern life, they could not but treat nature incidentally; moreover, like Morris Rosenfeld's, their appreciation of sensuous beauty was still somewhat tempered by the traditional distrust of mundane pleasure. Sholem Asch's regard for nature, on the contrary, is exceedingly affectionate; it penetrates to the heart of his being, and he often wrote of it with lyric abandon. In the preface to *Earth* he voices a pagan credo:

"And it was, that when I opened my eyes I saw a woman standing before me, and she was naked and barefoot. Her breasts were full and hidden in the stalks of the field, and her head was adorned with the fruit of the earth, and her shame

was covered with leaves of the fig tree . . . And it was, as she approached me I bowed my face to the earth and asked, 'Who art thou?' She answered me: 'I am the god thou hast asked for. I am the mother of all creation, the fruition that creates from endlessness to endlessness . . . I am the source of all life, and I am called *What Is*. Thy prayer have I heard, and I have come to thee because thou has called me. . . . To other gods man has turned, and the god his creator he has not recognized. For what is man if not one of my creations, drawing his sustenance from the earth, coming from her and returning to her, in accordance with the years? . . . . Other prophets have prophesied in the names of the gods of heaven. Thee I annoint as the prophet of the god of the earth . . . ' ''

This god is of an uncouth appearance: her plain sensual face, her heavy limbs, and her appeasing breasts betray a peasant origin; but her expansive, glowing heart throbs with godly solicitude. Because Asch is her prophet, his imagination is earthbound, stimulated by the smell of the soil and the beauty of its efflorescence; when unrestrained by his conscience he becomes primitively exuberant, poetically elated. He speaks truest when his theme is the sensuous joy of life or the intuitive unity of man with his Maker. His delineation of character is happiest when his subjects are at once simple and sensual — an intrinsic part of the primeval order in which everything is vitalized and personified. In such a world trees and grass, quadrupeds and creeping things, the river and the sky and the seasons join man in singing paeans to an abundant and generous universe.

Asch's stories of farm life give realistic expression to this pagan point of view. The peasants, in Poland as much as in Palestine, grow out of the soil and are a part of it. They feel instinctively that the earth is as much in need of the plow as they are of the grain. They live naturally, give vent to their emotions at will, and accept their harsh fate with child-like acquiescence. "I love the peasants," Asch writes, "Everything with them is as serious — as serious and simple as the earth itself." Nor does he distinguish between the uncouth muzhik and the Jewish rustic, believing as he does that the earth showers its blessings on all who depend upon it. This sentiment rises into self-conscious song when he

tells the story of the Palestinian pioneers who gather from all parts of Eastern Europe, unburden their minds of the crushing woes of modern civilization, and proceed to turn a deadly swamp into land fit for human habitation.

This ingenuousness is present in nearly all the characters that people Asch's books. His Jews are born offspring of nature and become chassidim and intellectuals by force of circumstance. Life is quickest in those who exist on an intuitive and unaffected level. The more artless are as simple as the little boy in *The Sinner* who cannot put his mind to study but whose soul revels in the beauty of trees and flowers:

"One day, as if heaven had suddenly revealed to him one of its secrets, he rose and went to school, and asked his teacher, 'Rabbi, what blessing does one make when much pleased with nature?' The teacher laughed and said: 'Blockhead! One says a blessing at the breaking of bread, after one has eaten; but to praise God at the sight of nature — who ever heard of such a thing?' So the little boy wondered: Nature is so beautiful, heaven so lovely, the earth so sweet and good, and a generosity and serenity pervades everything — and need not one praise God for all this? "

This idyllic innocence is exalted in the character of Jechiel, whose artlessness becomes his greatest strength and whose intense love of God and man invests him with the aura of sainthood. Even Asch's more sophisticated creations, such as Buchholz, Zachary Mirkin, Hans Bodenheimer, and Frank Melbourne, are essentially guileless — passive and perturbed in a world not of their own making.

Asch's women, even the most cultivated, are governed by their instincts almost as completely as his peasants. Once they beget children they become wholly dominated by their maternal drive. Red Zlatke, Sarah Rivke, Mrs. Hurvitz, Rivke, to mention only the more conspicuous, reveal a passion for their offspring as fierce as it is deep. For the sake of their young they suffer hunger and even death; what is more, their zeal is motivated not by normal maternal affection, but by the irresistible impulse of the beast. And exceptions like Emily Brown and Mrs. Halperin, who try to live as women rather than as mothers, are treated by Asch as anomalous and unworthy creatures.

The more youthful of his feminine characters are, willy-nilly, subject to man's pleasure. Their vital function is sexual in essence — it matters not whether they are hardened prostitutes or shy virgins, whether they freely offer their bodies or are ready to die in defense of their chastity. Asch's love of sensuous beauty, especially in the woman, often intoxicates him; his portrayal of sexual passion is reminiscent of *Song of Songs*. He frankly delights in amorous descriptions of the seductive nude. Mary in *The Road to Oneself* and Jeptha in *The Enchantress of Castile,* the more fascinating of his young women, are painted from various angles and in many moods. Tamar is depicted not as the demure maiden of the Old Testament ravished by her older half-brother, but as an erotic oriental princess cunningly rousing the passion of her lover and later killing him when he proves more martial than amorous. Sarah in *Shabbati Zevi* is drawn as a prophetess of carnal recklessness, hailing the Messiah but lusting after the messianic pretender. Lotte in *The War Goes On* is attracted to Hans at their first meeting and, blithely disregarding the ominous obstacles of race and class, gives herself to her lover with instinctive joyousness. Deborah in *The Mother* becomes Buchholz's mistress because she knows that he needs her. Emily Brown is kept from cohabiting with Frank only by mystical scruples forced upon her by her creator.

This adoration of the flesh governs Asch's men as well. Rabbis and thieves, patriarchs and revolutionists, intellectuals and merchants — all become aggressive males in the presence of an attractive woman. When their urge is thwarted or repressed, it comes out mercilessly. Amnon's sublimated passion leads to his death. Joel, the "holy young hermit," tries to enhance his spirit at the expense of his body only to disgrace himself completely. In *Wealthy Reb Shlome* the pious Chaim is one day discovered lying with a peasant girl; and Reb Shlome himself, the idealized patriarch, subdues his sensuality with great difficulty. Max Stone, married and middle-aged, cannot resist the allure of a pretty courtesan. Heinrich Bodenheimer cannot break with his "Aryan" mistress even though he is aware of her unfaithfulness. Uncle Moses is so infatuated with his young wife that he is made a cuckold without even suspecting it.

When his young men are not passionately aggressive, they become mystically filial. They suffer from a mother complex and seek satiety in the maternal bosom of the women they love. Buchholz permits Deborah to mother him as if he were her dearest child, and leaves her only because Miss Foster seems better able to cherish him. When Emily Brown drives Frank from her bed, he is not outraged by the rebuff because the mother in her attracts him equally as much. Zachary Mirkin is more drawn to his prospective mothers-in-law than he is to their daughters. Each of these men is emotionally immature and aching as much for a maternal caress as for the lover's embrace. Asch treats their anomalous yearning most sympathetically, perceiving them as the victims of their perturbed and warped instincts. As he remarks in a similar connection: "He began to feel that there is a higher power over man which compels him to do things he neither wishes nor dares. He began to realize that man's deeds are not dependent on his will, but on a secret irresistible power to which all are subject and to which he too was now subject."

Only Jechiel, of all of Asch's male protagonists, is not subject to this carnal drive. His exceptional status derives from his saintly eminence. Even as Jesus in *The Nazarene* he loved God so overwhelmingly, and his fellowmen so deeply and completely, that he had no need of further emotional appeasement. Because he knew that man must take to himself a wife, he accepted in marriage the first girl offered to him and was devoted to her until her untimely death. Thereafter he dedicated himself to the welfare of the poor and became the righteous man of his generation.

Sholem Asch does not excel as a formal stylist. He has little of the verbal force and clarity of expression of such writers as Peretz and Yehoash, or even Opatoshu and Singer. He is painstaking neither in his choice of words nor in the construction of his sentences, so that an otherwise beautifully written paragraph is as often as not marred by a commonplace phrase or ungrammatical clause. His language, taken as a whole, is marked more by the spontaneity and ebullience of intense feeling than by the polished brilliance of imaginative thought. His love of nature and his pleasure in sensuous

beauty come straight from the heart, and he expresses them not eloquently and precisely but with shouts of joy. When he depicts the simple, uncouth, but elementally fresh emotions of his rustics, his thieves, and his Warsaw poor, his style glows with poetic fervor; when his theme concerns the social and intellectual complexities of modern urban life, its development, especially in his earlier writings, reveals a certain lack of acumen and force. At all times, however, even when his ethical censor dominates his artistic expression, his prose is charged with lyric intensity. It is this intensity which imbues his delineation of nature and beauty and human emotions with creative vigor, and which in consequence gives him first place among living Yiddish writers.

POEMS

By Miriam Carr

WHEN I GROW OLD

When I grow old
I want to be
Like a snowflake white
On a silver tree.
I want to fade
Like a last caress
In a moment of
Brief loveliness:
And then I'll know
What the stars have told
The aching earth —
When I grow old.

MEETING AFTER YEARS

I do not love you — no . . .
But seeing you once more
Was like music in the night,
Or like trees along the shore;
Like children sleeping in the dark,
Or any lovely, quiet thing . . .
Like moonlight on a birch-tree's silver bark
And one dark bird aloft on silent wing . . .

WAITING TILL YOU COME

By TOM T. ERRILLA

There's a silver stream a-flowing
Through the shadow of a hill,
Where anemones are growing,
And the birds are never still,
Where the butterflies are flying,
And the dusky pines are sighing,
We are waiting, we are waiting —
Till you come.

There's a speckled trout a-dreaming,
In the shadows of a pool
That reflects the sunlight gleaming
Through the cedars sweet — and cool;
There's a hidden grouse a-drumming,
There's a woodpecker a-thrumming,
We are waiting, we are waiting,
Till you come.

There's a four-point buck a-lying
Mid the spruces of a swale,
And a lonely cougar crying
From the rocks above the trail;
There's a saucy squirrel calling
As he sets the cones a-falling.
We are waiting, we are waiting,
Till you come.

There are mountain breezes sighing
Through the cedars of the stream;
There are mountain quail a-flying
Where the frost-tinged aspen gleam
Don't you hear the cones a-falling?
Don't you hear the mountains calling?
We are waiting, we are waiting —
Till you come.

GABRIELA MISTRAL

Chile's Teacher-poet

By A. ORTIZ-VARGAS

In the year 1915, a group of sonnets appearing for the first time in a Chilean review brought to light a new and arresting personality on the stage of Spanish American poetic literature. The author was Lucila Godoy, but the parentage of her productions was concealed under the pseudonym of Gabriela Mistral, a surname famous in Provençal song. Her appearance was an epoch-making event, for it initiated a poetry that from the beginning bore the unmistakable stamp of things that endure. Her art, free from modern foreign influences, showed a distinctive individuality that at once placed her entirely apart from her contemporaries.

Most of her poetry reflects profound despair. It is deeply sad, so sad that it leaves a mournful impression. Although it may not gladden the heart, it elevates the mind by the nobility of its thought, by its high ideals, by its deep feeling for all that is frail and that suffers and dies. This sadness is partly the expression of personal grief and partly the effect produced on her spirit by desolate landscapes. We do not find the intonation of Shelley's melodious skylark, but rather the doleful admonition of Poe's somber raven. Pessimistic as is her view of life, this pessimism does not prevent her from seeing the beautiful aspects of the external world and from weaving her vision into a song as clear as an April day.

Unlike most of her contemporaries who sought their inspiration in the realm of the artificial, Mistral remained faithful to her soil, to her environment, to her people, and took as her themes things of common clay rather than of the air. Even when she sings the commonplace in life there is always a restraint, a dignity in her tone, as of one who lives habitually in the company of the great. Sometimes her song soars high as on eagle wings, but more often it is rooted in the fertile region of her own heart. Though her poetry does not have the rich sensuousness of Juana de Ibarburu,

Rosario Sansores, Alfonsina Storni, her sister-poets in Uruguay and Argentina, it is of a nobler, finer quality. Obviously she did not choose her models from the subtle masters of a decadent art, but delved into the books of those sages of old who looked deep into the souls of men. It seems, indeed, as if the Bible had breathed upon her the spirit of its poetry. Who knows what invisible threads thrown across the stellar spaces may have linked this poetess of Chile with the bards who gleaned their metaphors in the fields of Ruth the Moabitess? The garment, the accent, the imagery of her art is of Biblical texture.

With Dario's Modernista Movement coming mainly from France, the sentimental nightingale's plaintive voice of Romanticism fell silent in Spanish America. This movement of which José Asunción Silva in Colombia, Julian del Casal in Cuba, Gutierrez Nájera in Mexico were forerunners, strove in new metrical forms for a new conception of life; for a wider scope of vision and ideals; for an art less local, more universal. It widened immeasurably the panorama of poetry by creating new motives for song, new sensations for feeling, new sights to admire. Verse acquired a flexibility more harmonious; it became more subtle, more in contact with contemporary thought, with contemporary life; it had more delicacy of feeling, more sentiment and less sentimentality. As a part of this movement came the use and abuse of absurd metrical patterns, of a senseless free verse, of extravagant experiments in which the Futuristic School was patent. But with all these faults it was beneficial as an emancipator from the academic, the traditional, the stagnant.

However, French influence remained, and France became a sort of spiritual mentor in Spanish American poetic literature. Its verse, though most artfully handled by some master poets, was like the transplanted flower—beautiful but frail; it could not absorb the sap of the soil nor the rough winds of the prairies to which it was brought. In the midst of this exotic flora Mistral's poetry was an almost unique plant and she stood a figure as lonely and aloof as a peak of those Andian mountains from which she sprang. A word or two as to her personal history is not amiss.

Gabriela Mistral was born fifty-three years ago in a Chilean town in the Province of Elqui, and her childhood

days were spent within the narrow limits of a provincial life which provided no food for the spirit; for, paradoxically enough, the more widely our countries extend their physical boundaries, the narrower becomes their spiritual horizon; while the eye is gratified by the ever changing landscape, the mind is left to grope in darkness. She was sent to a primary school where she made little progress and consequently was sent back to her parents with the benevolent recommendation that she devote her time to household duties for which, in the opinion of the school authorities, she was better fitted. We can imagine this child-poet living in the rosy world of fancy which, in contrast to the ugliness of the material world of her surroundings, was filled with a beauty all its own. There, innumerable feelings, some sad, some gleeful, were beginning to take shape into the song that later was to be given to the world.

Then came disaster and bankruptcy. The old homestead had to be sold; the family scattered; death claimed beloved persons; and life, as was to be expected, revealed in all its nakedness its unwelcome truth. The young girl in dire need, without friends or means of support, found herself alone, facing the grim reality of facts. Some occupation had to be found, no matter how dull or grinding it might be, for the harsh necessity of living leaves no alternative. Work was found at last as secretary in a provincial school for rich girls; but the young woman who as yet was not aware that on this righteous earth there are distinctions of caste, even in the distribution of spiritual bread, opened the school doors to rich and poor alike. This move resulted in the loss of her position and once more rough paths stretched before her.

Next she became a school teacher in a remote town in Araucania, lost in the Andian mountains and surrounded by those Araucanians whose heroic resistance to the Spanish invaders during the Conquest is one of the thrilling romances of South American history. It was in these wild surroundings that she penetrated the real soul of the Indian race, a soul so deep and so mournful and yet so little understood. Ever after and wherever her wanderings have taken her she has been a staunch champion of the defenseless aboriginal races of the Spanish American countries.

In Santiago, Chile's capital city, she was appointed

principal of a Government school and it was there that an unfortunate love came into her life and cast its gloomy shadow on all her poetical productions. *The Sonnets of Death* and *Interrogation,* those lines of anguish in which she begs Christ's forgiveness for one guilty of self destruction, hinted at a hidden tragedy about which we should not be too inquisitive, for there are secret places in the human heart upon which none should intrude.

When José Vasconcelos, as Secretary of Public Instruction, undertook the Educational Reform in Mexico, he called Gabriela Mistral to colloborate in this great enterprise. How significant and far reaching this Reform, based on the training of the worker and the peasant along modern lines, has been, and how high a place it has gained for the Aztec nation among the other Spanish-speaking countries is well known. Mexico soon became the center of this American Renaissance, to which a host of able educators came from all parts of the world to contribute. Gabriela Mistral went through the length and the breadth of the nation opening new schools, new cultural institutions, new public libraries, and her work was so successful that it led to her appointment as Chilean Delegate on the Committee of Intellectual Co-operation of the League of Nations in Paris. In Mexico City she published her *Lectures Escolares* for use in the public school that bears her name.

From that time she became a sort of homeless pilgrim moving from place to place, engaged in various intellectual activities. She has taught in South and Central America, lectured in the United States, represented her country in an official capacity in Rome, Paris, Cairo, Madrid and Lisbon. She has written much during these travels but we dare say that the best of her work was done while a humble school teacher amid the mountain solitudes of the Andes. She has been guest lecturer on Spanish American literature in Barnard, Middlebury and Vassar Colleges and her book of poems *Desolación* was first printed in 1922 under the auspices of the Instituto de las Españas of New York.

All her spiritual life with its inward conflicts, shattered hopes and mystic longings, is revealed in this small volume of some hundred poems the general tone of which is one of deep dejection; but among this collection of somber jewelry

there are gems of rare brightness in the children's verses and in the prose poems which contain the very essence of Mistral's poetry. In these children's verses it seems as if the singer who has been communing with the stern preacher of Ecclesiastes sought the sweeter society of the Savior and seated at His feet absorbed the music of His parables. These pilgrimages to the brighter side of Canaan are short, for she returns all too soon to the dismal abode of the ancient prophets.

Somber as are her gems, they are magnificent in their intrinsic quality. While in the more populous cities of Spanish America her sister-poets were polishing and re-polishing with an exquisite aesthetical sensuousness their almost too perfect rhymes, this recluse of Parnassus buried deep in some Chilean town was writing from the fulness of her heart, lines less polished, but far more profound:

Perchance my loss
is not your image, but my soul,
my soul carved in your face
like a wound.

When life wounds me
where shall I seek your face
if now even your dust
is in my soul?

Earth, keep his bones:
even his form I shall not keep.
You throw him flowers,
I throw him shadows . . .

Or these whose very rhythm is a sob:

He passed with another
and I saw him pass.
Sweet was the wind,
quiet the road.
And these anguished eyes
watched them as they passed.

Mistral's thought is substantial and her manner of expression severe. Profound books which treasure the wisdom of the ages had given her much food for meditation. It would not surprise us to learn that perhaps some time in her life, some Indian sage had immersed her in the Nîrvana of his philosophy and there she believed she had found the secret of life. For in those Brahminical lands of dreams beyond dreams, men's eyes refuse to look at the external world for fear of losing the occult vision that blinds and fascinates them, and she who has seen the infinite misery of human existence knows the value of contemplation. But it is not to this dreamland of Buddha that she looks in her most meditative moments, it is to the land of Jesus clouded by the everlasting sadness of the Psalmist. It is there that this spiritual daughter of the prophets weeps against the walls of her Jerusalem:

Here I am, O God! my face fallen in the dust,
I shall speak to Thee in this twilight
and in all the twilights till the end of life,
and for as long as Thou withholdest the word for which I wait.

With sobs and entreaties, I beseech Thee
dog-like, lapping the hem of Thy mantle.
Thy loving eyes cannot escape me
nor ignore my weeping.

Forgive! Forgive at last! Thy word scattered on the winds
will be as an hundred flasks of perfume, emptied;
the desert will give forth flowers and the rock
will give forth radiance.

In her soul resound the cries of Job, the lamentations of Jeremiah, the pessimism of Ecclesiastes. Since she has learned from the very pens of the Biblical writers that all under the sun is vanity of vanities, that man's days are full of anguish and of labour, and that in much wisdom is much grief, it is small wonder that she reminds us:

We are orphans, we walk alone,
all flesh is anguish that longs for death.

Truly, the man in the Land of Uz was no more distressed when he cursed the day whereon he was born, than Mistral when she utters the tremendous apostrophes in her *Poem of the Son*:

And the horror that one day
his mouth burning with rancour
he will say unto me what I said unto my father:
"Why has your weeping flesh been prolific,
why have my mother's breasts been swollen?"

Blessed be my breasts in which my people are buried,
blessed be my womb in which my race is done:
my mother's face no longer will be seen,
her voice in the wind like a dirge . . .

My poor dead face the sun and the West Wind,
with longing, for in me they are blind.
My lips are tired of the fervent prayers
they are saying in my song,
before my song is ended.

And again as if borrowed from Job are the lines:

Miserable flesh,
dead, like a withered branch,
will not sleep by your side,
but, tremulous, clutches the impure breast of life.

After the manner of the Hebrew bards she bestows her own trembling sensitiveness on things of nature, and the inanimate objects around her personify her sorrow:

Alone in the plain,
a withered tree — like a blasphemy —
stretches to the sky,
a white tree, rotten, eaten with wounds,
in which the wind,

like my despair,
shrieks and passes . . .

The broken voice of David moaning over the death of Saul and Jonathan and calling in such superb hyperbolical language to the Hills of Gilboa to bear witness to his anguish, finds an echo in Mistral's poem summoning the whole earth to hear the Lord's pardon to the self destroyer who saddened her life:

Fiery eyes of wild beasts will moisten,
the rocky peaks Thou madest
will weep through their snowy eyelids:
all earth will know Thou hast forgiven!

In the cosmic desolation expressed in these two lines we find the tone of Jeremiah:

Sorrow runs in the flowing
of the ceaseless waters . . .

The amorous languor of the Rose of Sharon in the Wise King's voluptuous lyrics vibrates in the exquisite verses:

If you look at me,
I shall become as beautiful
as the earth sparkling with dew,
the tall reeds will not know my radiant face
when I pass by the river.

Biblical, too, is the background of the poem *Ruth,* so rich in bold metaphors:

Ruth the Moabitess gleans in the fields
though hers not even a barren plot,
but God being master of the land,
she gleans in grounds divine.

Autumnal skies, roads strewn with yellow leaves, the ruddy glow of twilights gleaming through the poplars, a lone-

ly tree in a lonely field, a flying cloud where she sees the evanescent form of one she had loved in life, a solitary star glimmering high in the skies, the slow, musical pounding of the rain, are the things that stir the very depths of her imagination. She walks on those autumnal roads in the dim twilight with the Book of Job under her arm, a thoughtful pilgrim pondering the mysteries of life and still more the mysteries of death. Death is her obsession. It haunts her soul like a ghost, she sees it everywhere and every moment of her life she is reminded of its tremendous omnipresence. Looking at Rodin's magnificent sculpture she finds in *The Thinker* the man lost in the Kingdom of Shadows whence none returns:

> His chin in his rude hand
> the thinker remembers he is flesh for the grave.

And, when she dares probe into the abysmal gulf of the future, it is to find there not that happiness — a mirage indeed — that we all seek, but the profound certainty of decay:

> Heaped with ashes
> my mother's temples for many a day . . .

To the "Virgin in the Hill" where she goes at eventide to unburden the heaviness of her sorrow, she confesses:

> At nightfall fear of death
> haunts my soul.

In love, which appears as the terrible force with which man cannot trifle and from which he cannot escape, so sweet and so bitter, so powerful and yet so fleeting, she feels not the happy hours but the sorrowful end:

> Love throws a veil,
> you wear the veil;
> he extends his warm arm
> and you follow spellbound,
> though you know
> death will conquer.

At the end of all human cares, Death must come, the Almighty, the one sure thing in existence:

There will be a time
for the long rest,
dust and shadow
in our fingers . . .

One after another in mournful procession come to her the dear vanished faces that death had changed into cold, yellow wax:

O Blessed wax!
wax eternal,
rigid in death.

And from beyond life, a voice calling her deep and sad:

The dead beckons
to his bridal bed of bones.

Few things have appeared in contemporary Spanish American poetry more powerfully emotional than Mistral's *Sonnets of Death.* The chords she strikes there are not merely sentimental, but robust major chords, struck with such passion, such bitterness and such poetic feeling that we see at once that we have before us one of the truly great poets:

They will dig:
I will come to the city of silence
to sleep beside you.
When I am all covered
then we shall talk for all eternity.

With the tragic end of a human life so bitterly and so dearly beloved by the poetess as revealed in these sonnets, an end which destroyed for her all possible hope of happiness on earth, she now turns her tearful eyes, her trembling aspirations, her emptiness of heart, to that mystic kingdom for

which she always had a secret longing. She becomes a sort of lay nun cloistered within the high walls of her own sorrow. She is intent not in securing her own salvation but in obtaining God's forgiveness for the sinful lover who waits in the dim regions of departed souls. Life holds nothing for her, all words which were to be spoken have already been spoken and even merciful time offers no release:

> Now, Christ, lower my eyelids;
> time now is superfluous,
> all words have been said.

As remembrance grows clearer, her vision of life becomes gloomier and gloomier. Her path is dark, bitter all men's words, utterly useless all human endeavors:

> In this hour, bitter as a mouthful of sea,
> sustain me, Christ.
> The road is filled with shadows,
> my cry is filled with fear.

And to Christ, who also was forsaken, she cries in His own lasting words:

> Our Father who art in Heaven
> why hast Thou forgotten me!

But the obsession persists even in this mystic world. She can neither deliver herself from the torturing memory of her lover nor can she join him at his last resting place, and life becomes both shameful and unendurable:

> I feel shame
> to live in this cowardly way,
> I neither go in search of you
> nor can I forget you.

The yearning to see him no matter where, no matter how, in bright ethereal regions or in Plutonian shores overcomes all other desires:

Oh, no! To see you again
no matter where,
in the broad calm of heaven,
in the yawning abyss,
under placid moons
or in a livid horror.

Her despair is felt in the sweet, tearful music of *Autumn*:

Sweetly evening faded
behind the poplars.
It did not bleed
for my sad heart.

And in *Clouds*:

Clouds, flowers, features
draw me that face
that treacherous time
is effacing . . .

But finally life was merciful. With serene hours came serene words:

Now let us change
the song bitter with gall
for the sweet song.
Violets blossom,
the winds waft an odor of honey
over the valley.

Now we must leave this world of sorrow in which we have been lingering with its creator and turn to that bright world that she unfolds in her poems for children. Here, the poetess's fertile, maternal nature is shown in all its infinite goodness. Fate did not grant her the creature of her own flesh and blood for whom she so bitterly sobs in her *Poem of the Son,* but ironically enough it gave her in large numbers as school teacher, the children of others to instruct and protect, and she fulfilled her duty with a truly Christian un-

derstanding. It was for the school children of Spanish America that she wrote those beautiful lyrics that are among the brightest gems of her poetical production. How easily she moves in that enchanted world of childhood that we all know and the memory of which remains long after the dream has vanished in the broad light of definite knowledge. As a great artist she possesses that very faculty of imagination to such a high degree that it enables her to see and to feel all the marvels in childhood's wonderland. She knows that in some remote corner of that world some poet, some seer, some redeemer is always being born. From those fairy lands so marvelously pictured by the great Colombian poet, Rafael Pombo, comes her musical story of Red Riding Hood, her poem of the Guardian Angel, her children's prayer for the nests, the trees and the stars. All of these are beautiful airy lyrics interfused with the spirit of high poetic art, and we are certain that Rabindranath Tagore would gladly have included in his magic box melodies like these whose masterly translation we owe to Miss Alice Stone Blackwell:

Where shall we dance in a circle?
shall it be on the shores of the sea?
The sea will dance with its thousand waves,
an orange-flower garland free.

Shall it be at the foot of the mountains?
Each mount will an answer fling,
as if all the stones of all the world
were longing at heart to sing.

Shall it be in the depths of the forest?
Its voices will blend, in bliss;
the songs of children and songs of birds
in the wind will meet and kiss.

We will dance in an infinite circle;
in the woods we will weave it with glee;
we will dance at the foot of the mountains,
and on all the shores of the sea!

In her prose poems Mistral reaches the very peak of her art. Those productions of a noble intellect embrace universal life with all its miseries, small joys, great expectations.

Her famous *Poemas de las Madres* are a part of this collection which by their rather too colorful representation of expectant motherhood were grossly misjudged by prudish women in some Spanish American countries, but which are among her best poems. In them she pleads the cause of those unhappy creatures of the lower classes who, about to become mothers, are abandoned by society as undeserving sinners; and she employs all the powerful resources of her art to show the dignity and sacredness of a state which in itself commands the profoundest respect while being a severe indictment of Christian society. The reception accorded these poems by the intellectual public shows how deeply they touched their hearts and how groundless were the outcries of puritanical virtue.

The remainder of this collection is composed of those significant trivialities that from birth to death touch every human existence, and without which life would be devoid of all sentiment. But it needs the divine sorcery of art to give life to these trifles, to infuse them with emotion, to bring them into relief and prove to our astonished eyes how beautiful the familiar can be. Commonplace as the objects of our everyday lives are in themselves, when viewed with the aid of the Aladdin-like lamp of poetry, they become an essential part of us, throbbing like a heart's beat. Mistral's art gives a voice and a soul to these inanimate things, and makes us cherish them. In what beautiful accents she recalls the rustic lamp casting its pale light on the favorite book or on the deep furrows of a beloved face, on the clay figures fresh from the potter's hands, on the lonely hearth, the humble plant at the side of the road! These are all small things but they are the things that make the world in which great poets, such as Gabriela Mistral, live.

Faithful to her soil, faithful to her people and, above all, faithful to her art, she stands as one of the most original, distinctive and intense individualities of Spanish American poetic literature. Her artistic creed of humaness and sincerity is clearly expressed in the advice given in the *Decalogue of the Artist*:

"Thy work thou shalt bring forth as a mother her offspring: drawing upon thy heart's blood."

I SING OF NEW ORLEANS

By LESLIE COLLINS

I

I sing of New Orleans,
Colorful port of gaiety,
Where strong grew Ol' Abe's resolve
To loose the shackles, the chains of slavery.

II

I sing of New Orleans,
Of sawdust restaurants and alcohol inns,
Of cloistered nuns a-praying
Next door to devil-dins.

III

I sing of New Orleans,
Of a quadroon in the French quarter
Who invitingly smiles
With untaught lips for the one who bought her.

IV

I sing of New Orleans,
Of noisy Negroes uptown
And honey-eyed creoles
Who dance and sing downtown.

V

I sing of New Orleans,
Where Africa's gold coast is Rampart Street,
Where Bootblack Bennie is M'sieur
And in full flush life's rhythms beat.

VI

I sing of New Orleans,
Of lusty-voiced vendors of bananas,
Of dark women who live by pies and pralines,
And eternal laughter beneath bright bandanas.

VII

I sing of New Orleans;
No sorrow song, no lyric of the levee,
But this chanson d'amour
In my spirit's desire to be free.

MY HEART'S IN THE SWAMPLAND

My heart's in the swampland, at the foot of a cypress tree,
Where sweet are the jasmine and the sound of a whisp'ring wind.
My home's in the swampland, where the whip-o-will calls me friend,
And soft is the moonlight as it stirs me to reverie.

Oh, hear the lonely locust,
A-crying in a high oak tree.
A-weeping is the lonely locust,
Calling, calling to me.

I harken to his song of sorrow;
And ere the night turns to morrow
I shall answer the lonely locust
Calling, yes, calling to me.

STEVEDORE

The enigmatic moon has at long last died.
Even as the ancient Cathedral Saint Louis
Peals her lazy call
To a sleepily solemn worship,
Night's mysterious shadows reveal their secrets

And rise into nothingness
As honest day unfurls her bright banners.

The stevedore,
Sleep spilled on his face,
Braves the morning's rising fog,
The saturating chill.

As the sun burns itself out in summer brilliance,
Though his heart be sweated out
In water glistening from gargantuan shoulders,
He finds strength in his voice,
Singing of Moses down in Egypt-land,
Of yesterday's untrue love.

By evening
The sun-scorched stevedore has packed strange cargoes
On alien ships
Whose destinations stir no romantic desires.

All day
A little of his soul is put to sea.

And now that the heaven's sun-burnt gold
Has quickened to deepest lapis-lazuli,
He turns an unkempt head
Homeward
To a dreamless slumber.

CREOLE GIRL

Creole Girl,
When you dance
Do you think of Spain, —
Purple skirts and clipping castanets,
Creole Girl?

Creole Girl,
When you laugh
Do you think of France, —

Gold wine and mincing minuets,
Creole Girl?

Creole Girl,
When you sing
Do you think of young America, —
Grey guns and battling bayonets,
Creole Girl?

Creole Girl,
When you cry
Do you think of Africa, —
Blue nights and casual canzonets,
Creole Girl?

MARDI GRAS

Dapper dandies with yellow canes
And every beauty, and every clown
In the Vieux Carré
Riotously run the gamut of gaiety.
Today life-bars are down.
Today gorgeously gowned in her carnival colors
Of orange, purple, and green,
And gloriously groomed in old world glamor,
New Orleans is hostess, regal, queen.

TWO NUNS IN THE FRENCH QUARTER

Exiled forever are these two holy things,
Angels of mercy; angels without wings.

They have had their one rendezvous
At the holy altar. With worldly goods they're through.

Morning, noon, night
Their prayers take heavenly flight;

And in eternal touch with the husbandlike Christ-in God
Are these sacred creatures of the sod.

That shy one, — pretty thing! So delicate, so mild,
Might have found strength in her lover's child.

The fat, freckled one has known the sun, the field
And the joys of the goodly harvest's yield.

Bless you, sisters, and your charity.
Pray; thank you; pray for me.

But, God! Jésu! by all the saints above!
Let me live, laugh, love!

VISITORS

By Stanton A. Coblentz

Out of the past, the deep, ghost-haunted past,
They came with shouts and jesting to my door.
And time flowed backward twenty years or more
To the young days when I beheld them last.
They too had aged; their dark eyes overcast
With shadows, yet with laughter as before;
And the same essence, from some tight-locked core,
Looked out beneath all crusts the years amassed.

Then a weird vision came to me, as though
I were an unfleshed spirit that surveyed
Old fellow wanderers of the world below
Like clouds advancing in a dream parade,
And sensed at times, drawn to some drifting shade,
That we had met in passing long ago.

SILLANPAA — FINLAND'S WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE

By RICHARD BECK

The eyes of the civilized world have recently been focused on the heroic struggle of the Finnish people to defend their independence and national existence against overwhelming odds.

That circumstance has inevitably called forth an appraisal of the significant cultural contributions of the Finns in many fields. Attention was specifically drawn to the importance of their literature by the announcement that the Swedish Academy had awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1939 to the Finnish author, Frans Eemil Sillanpää.

This did not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the work of this great writer and his prominent place among present-day Northern authors. In recent years he has a number of times been proposed as a worthy recipient of the prize, and his selection was received with general approval, one might even say enthusiasm, in the Scandinavian countries.

He is the first Finnish author to be so honored; and the people of the North rejoiced especially in the fact that a highly gifted and distinguished son of Finland was awarded this coveted literary honor in these fateful days for his nation. This award from Sweden was symbolic of the genuine sympathy for Finland on the part of her sister nations of the North.

Although he can look back upon uncommonly rich literary production, Sillanpää is still in his prime, his early sixties. He was born September 16, 1888, in Tavastkyrö in southwestern Finland. He is the son of poor peasants, his father being a tenant farm-laborer, and it is therefore not at all surprising that his books are characterized by a strong flavor of the soil.

Early Sillanpää showed aptitude for learning, and, in spite of their poverty, his parents sent him to school. After having completed his preparatory education in Tammerfors

(Tampere), he entered the University of Helsingfors (Helsinki), at the age of twenty, beginning by studying medicine; later he specialized in the sciences: biology, physics, chemistry and zoology. These studies, it has been pointed out, account for that "original biological viewpoint which appears in his works." (L. Viljanen).

After five years he gave up his studies, partly because of financial difficulties, but probably, as the Finnish critic Vaaskivi has suggested, more than anything else because of a desire to return to the country where he always has felt most at home.

Sillanpää's years at the University were of inestimable value to him in other respects than already indicated. It was his good fortune to become intimately associated with the Järnefelt family, in those years a refuge and a second home for authors, poets and promising men of learning among the younger generation. This home was a fruitful center of the growing Finnish national movement of the period; literature and art there occupied a place of honor. For a young student and a budding poet it was both inspiring and stimulating to belong among the friends of this remarkable family. Here Sillanpää made the acquaintance of the three gifted Järnefelt brothers, all of whom later distinguished themselves: Arvid as an author, Eero as a painter, and Armas as a composer and musician. Their sister was married to Jean Sibelius, the world-famed composer, whom Sillpanpää therefore learned to know and admire during these formative days. Included in this circle of writers and artists were likewise Juhani Aho, the famous novelist, who together with Alexis Kivi, may be looked upon as the father of Finnish prose; J. H. Erkko, the lyric poet, noted especially for his patriotic poems; and the painter Pekko Halonen.

With his studies in the natural sciences at the University and by his close association with many of the most gifted and influential Finnish authors and artists of the day — indeed a choice company of kindred spirits — Sillanpää laid the secure foundation for his future labors in the realm of letters and the cultural advancement of his people. He has, to be sure, enriched Finnish literature immeasurably, and indirectly thereby the literature of the world generally. His lasting achievement consists further in his having, with the insight

of the deeply sensitive and truly great poet, interpreted the national life and culture of the Finnish people to themselves. This he has done with the all-embracing compassion born of profound understanding.

It should be noted, as might be expected, that Sillanpää was also stimulated by impulses from abroad, not least from older contemporary Scandinavian authors. A noted Finnish literary critic evaluates these as follows: "Hamsun, Maeterlinck, and Strindberg had made the deepest impression on him and awakened his own creative gifts." (L. Viljanen).

Upon return to his rural home environs Sillanpää married the daughter of a neighboring peasant, Sigrid Maria Salomäki, and entered in earnest upon a literary career, beginning by writing short stories. It is indicative of his early literary interest that when he was but twelve years of age, his first contribution had appeared in the local paper. Aside from a number of full-length novels he has published several collections of short stories and numerous newspaper articles. He was editor of the Finnish paper *Pano* from 1925-1926.

Sillanpää's first novel, *Life and Sun,* appeared in 1916; while it cannot be considered one of his most notable works, although indeed a remarkable first novel, it clearly revealed him as an original and gifted writer of whom greater literary achievements might surely be expected.

Those expectations were more than realized with the appearance of his second novel, *Meek Heritage* (Det fromma eländet), 1919. Here his great literary genius blossoms forth for the first time, and this story soon carried his fame to other lands. It appeared in an English translation in 1938 and won deserved praise from leading critics in this country. This graphic and compelling novel, which records the author's reactions to Finland's war for independence, has been summarized thus:

"It is the story of a feeble-minded Finnish farm laborer of old but decayed peasant stock, who after a life of drudgery and poverty, is drawn into the Civil War on the side of the Reds; he is shot by the Whites without ever having more than the vaguest notion of the issues involved." (J. B. C. Watkins)

Obviously, it requires both penetrating insight and sympathetic understanding of the human heart to invest ap-

parently such an ordinary story with literary greatness; but that is exactly what Sillanpää has succeeded in doing, and this is, of course, the very proof of his genius as a writer. In the hands of a mediocre author such a theme would have become commonplace and have been buried in trivialities; as treated by the great literary master, the story of the impoverished simple Finnish farm-hand becomes a moving drama of heroic dimensions. For it is in reality much more than his story, although he occupies the center of the stage; it is "a vivid picture of the history of Finland" and of the life of the rural people, whom the author describes sensitively and sympathetically with his inimitable lyric touch. His intimate knowledge of rural Finland and its farmfolk is clearly reflected on every page, yea, even in every line. Tovio Vaaskivi, the literary critic and Sillanpää's biographer, has observed, and not without justifications, that the author here lays bare the "tragedy of elemental man." Which is but another way of underscoring the universal appeal and significance of this notable novel.

Sillanpää's next work in that branch of literature was *Hiltu and Ragnar* (1923), a sad love story, noted for its compactness and delicate interpretation of character and marked by the author's growing cosmic interest, an interest that had been accentuated by his reading of Spengler.

Otherwise, during the period 1919-1931, Sillanpää devoted himself mostly to the writing of short stories, ever a favorite literary form of his, and in which he has achieved conspicuous success, although all such stories of his are far from being of equal excellence.

Sillanpää excels indeed in psychological insight and in nature descriptions; above all, as already indicated, he succeeds admirably in picturing the everyday life of the Finnish peasant. All these qualities are marked characteristics of his beautiful though tragic novel *Silja* (1931), generally considered his masterpiece, which was published in an English translation in 1933.

Here the author tells the sad story of a Finnish farm maid, "the last offshoot of an old family tree." We accompany her from farm to farm; see her face extreme poverty and overcome temptations in the roughest of human environment. But her nobility of soul and purity of heart make her

conquer her hostile surroundings. Finally, we see her die prematurely from consumption.

A tragic tale to be sure, starkly realistic, but told with tenderness and heart-warming human sympathy. Vivid characterization and graphic description of the Finnish scene here go hand in hand. The heroine, Silja, is a person that lingers long in the reader's memory. According to Sillanpää himself, she was "to depict a young Finnish girl as a representative of pure and beautiful humanity as it appeared to him in the midst of a feverish and disrupted age." (Viljanen) In that respect he has fully achieved his purpose, giving to his theme a universality which lifts it above and beyond the limits of the Finnish rural scene where the story is laid.

Some readers have no doubt wondered about the origin of the poetic name, Silja; for me at least it has a haunting quality. It has been accounted for in this way. Sillanpää was a genuine admirer of the great Swedish lyric poet, Erik Axel Karlfeldt, who, as many will recall, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature posthumously in 1931. It is one of Karlfeldt's well-known poems, "Jungfru Maria," which is said to have been Sillanpää's inspiration for the character of the maid, Silja, only in outline, of course. There is, however, undeniably a kinship between Jungfru Maria and Silja, when one compares the two.

Now followed in rapid succession two major novels from Sillanpää's pen. The first of these was *A Man's Road,* 1932. In a new garb it is the old story of a man torn between the choice of love or wealth. Paavo Ahrola, a young farmer, is prevailed upon to forsake the love of his youth and marry a woman of wealth, whom he does not love at all. When she dies, his loneliness drives him into a life of dissipation, from which he is rescued by his forsaken beloved, Alma, a woman of strong character, who dominates the story. She is the one who conquers the obstacles barring their road to happiness, which they find in the end. There are those who would place this novel on a literary level with *Silja* or even higher; at any rate, *A Man's Road* is a gripping story, with the impressive background of cosmic forces masterfully entwined with the fate of the children of men.

The mystic and cosmic element is still more prominent in *People in Summer Night,* 1934, which might rightfully be characterized as a prose poem — such is its lyric quality — a hymn of praise to the enchanting light, northern summer night. The scene, of course, is rural Finland, but could just as well be elsewhere in the North. The events are compressed within one weekend in the month of July, everyday occurrences of everyday people, but through the magic of the poet's art this scene is changed into a veritable fairy-world.

Viljanen does not err when he characterizes Sillanpää in this manner: "He is a poetic dreamer in whose writings fragrant lyric moods alternate with keen intellectual analysis in a highly personal way."

Finland is, as is well known, a bi-lingual country, the Swedish speaking part of the population forming, however, only a comparatively small minority. But much literary activity, noteworthy alike for its richness and variety, is carried on in both languages, with the Finnish element rapidly gaining ground.

Although he speaks both languages, Sillanpää writes, as amply indicated, in Finnish. He thus carries on the literary tradition of such eminent Finnish authors as Kivi, known to the English-speaking world through the translation (1929) of his penetrating novel of Finnish peasant life, *Seven Brothers,* and of Aho, brilliant interpreter of Finnish life and an equally brilliant stylist, to whom reference has already been made.

As behooves the successor of such highly gifted predecessors Sillanpää has reached even greater literary heights; distinctly of the native Finnish tradition, he has fashioned his literary mansions on the solid foundation of the past, but according to his own design.

THE TALL JEW

By WALTER HEIBY

Part One: His Life

Of strange stories,
he wondered . . .
He wondered
about those stories
of a virgin birth,
of a vacuous whiteness seen by shepherds,
and of a star
that led those shepherds
to his birthplace in a stable.
Of strange stories,
he wondered.

He wondered,
while visions, thundering over visions,
condensed into an image of godhead
in the *I*.
Visions gyrated . . .
he wondered,
then he knew —
he was the Son of God!
He was the one divined to lead his people —
lead from the mechanic rule of custom,
from *"an eye for an eye"* to *"love your neighbor,"*
his people.

In the synagogue
he had talked with the learned.
Yes, he had talked . . . and listened . . .
At twelve years his mind
had ignited words to eloquence;
and the doctors, amazed, saw a great future for this boy.
They believed in him and
he in himself.
Yes, he believed in himself . . .

For years he dreamed and wondered.
There was that inner tearing,
the birth pain of a soul.
He believed in himself.
He knew he must outgrow little Nazareth;
he was too big for carpentry.
Divined to lead his people . . .
he was the Son of God!

Then, one day, he left those quiet streets of Nazareth,
left his shop,
went to John
and was baptized.
With that shock of liquid coldness
he felt the surging of divinity,
then the utter power of spirit . . .
He had outgrown his littleness.
There came those forty days of wilderness,
one thousand hours of sun-yellow sand and cold star night, and he
alone with wonder.
Days of doubt — and growth . . .
in forty after Jordan
he had outgrown small Nazareth.

And then, he gathered men:
a dozen nobodies, fishermen, small town shopkeepers, and a tax collector,
made into fishers of men.
Twelve of the people given to time.

Under the sun-soaked skies of Galilee
he preached to crowds,
of peace, of good will,
and the brotherhood of man,
explaining simply with parables
so all might understand;
and some had listened.

Some had listened . . .
Crowds on hillsides,

some jeering, some believing,
had heard the message
of this preacher,
and some believed.
Had felt the iron of gentleness and power,
marvelled and understood.
Some had listened — too many,
to this blasphemer.

Yes, this man called Jesus
in words and acts
echoed the thoughts of blasphemous rebellion.
So said the Scribes and Pharisees.
That day at the temple — the city's bank —
the house of God —
with an angry noise of hated words,
with the money-changers whipped,
the cattle and the doves set free,
was remembered.
His mingling with Samaritans,
his healing on the Sabbath day,
this law-breaking — remembered.
"Give unto Cæsar those things . . . and unto God" . . .
"Let him who is without sin . . . stone . . . her" . . .
Strange words
remembered.
He was called blasphemer —
and blasphemers must die!

He healed.
Recall those days in Galilee —
the paralytic and the man with withered hand.
Recall the lame, the blind,
the lepers,
healed.

Recall.

He healed
and brought happiness
to many;
but he incited the people,

fought the code of Moses,
had said his life was divined.
Were there not stories of a virgin birth,
and of angels visiting shepherds?
Had he not healed
sick minds and bodies?
But he had said he was the Son of God
and for such blasphemy
must die!

For years he had preached,
but then (with the crowds seeking new cults and cultists)
his following decreased;
and they that hated, now acted.
There was
the feast of the passover
with the one and twelve in a hotel room . . .
and Jesus saying his own friends would betray
and deny him
before red sun had drenched another day —
the quiet terror of those words, "BEHOLD THE HAND THAT BETRAYETH ME IS WITH ME ON THE TABLE" . . .
denials . . . more . . .
and psychotic Judas fleeing to betrayal.
Gethsemane . . .
friends gone . . .
soldiers . . .
the acid kiss . . .
the trial . . . Pilate . . . the red washing . . .
a crown of thorns answering his silence . . .
the biting whip . . . the heavy cross upon his red wet back . . .
the long road . . .
Deserted by friends, his own disciples doubting him,
he, the Son of God, must die . . .

The drama is moved
by hungry men.
The littleness that in each generation
attempts to force oblivion
upon the greatness in the same,
is once again aroused.

And the drama is moved
by hungry men . . .

PART TWO. HIS DEATH

A spring day — 30 A. D.,
at Golgotha, the place of skulls,
three crosses stand upon the hill.
Today humanity holds its totem feast[1]
and watches the agony of him who is upon the central cross—
he who said he was the Son of God.

How the crowd delights
in the pain of the blasphemer!
Listen to him cry,
"MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?"
Can't he hear the ages singing
"TRUSTING JESUS — THAT IS ALL"?[2]
The jeers of the mob —
some mouths still wet with hosannas shouted last Sunday
some hands still smelling of palms . . .
those jeers . . .
the vinegar to drink,
the nails,
the noise . . .
"He trusted God! Let God save him now!"
This, then, is to be death
for the man;
but soon,
from the death of this man
is to be born
The Christ!
"Himself he cannot save!"
Strange . . .
amorphic music of noise,
and the people, pushing, jeering,
to the rhythm of a martyr's dripping redness.
"See the king of the Jews — between two thieves!"
"Save yourself!"

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[1]For a discussion of the totem feast and its relation to Jesus and Christ, see Moses and Monotheism by Sigmund Freud, pages 132-138.

[2]Title of a well known hymn.

shouts from these, of the people.
Then an unheard murmur from acid-soaking lips,
"FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."
And now, distilled from pain,
that victorious whisper,
"IT IS FINISHED."
Strange . . .
hurled at a brain,
this noise . . .

Twilight . . .
then soon the quiet chaos of blackness.
The crowd leaves,
and there is only the silence of the spring night
with a somewhat purple echo of madness on the wind.
Above, cool white Arcturus
looks down upon a cross
that is to rock the world.
Bright Arcturus (who, some say, led shepherds to his birth-
place in a stable),
bright Arcturus watches again a drama of the earth-men,
observes the irony of a comedy played by little men,
and then retreats to rest.

Arcturus climbs down the north-west
while dawn climbs up the east.
Soon there will be silent shadows,
dead, sun-framed shadows of three crosses
crawling up the hill.
And soon the mob
will come again to jeer
a cross their children are to deify.

In pain, Arcturus
smiles . . .

NOTE

This poem attempts to subordinate the more incredible events in the life of Jesus to the events and situations relevant to the development of an image of the man and of his death. The miracles associated with his birth, even though they are completely omitted in Mark, which is undoubtedly the earliest Gospel, are

mentioned since it was felt that they offered a satisfactory, if not completely reasonable, explanation for the development in Jesus of a feeling of his personal divinity. The miracles associated with his death are, on the other hand, completely omitted since they bear no relation to the life of Jesus as a man. The pronouns referring to Jesus are, of course, not capitalized since we are considering him as a man, rather than as a god, in spite of his rising feeling of his own divinity.

The second part of the poem was cast in the present tense in order to take advantage of its greater possibilities for emotional development. — AUTHOR.

EXCHANGE

By Virginia Irene Sullivan

"Give me my dream," I begged of the wind.
And over the top of the hill
Mocking, laughing, it called to me,
"And what will you give for the dream?"
Impulsive, I cried,
"Whatever you wish,
Only give me this beautiful dream."

A laughing, evasive sprite was the wind,
With hair black as night and eyes like the sea.
Her robe was as white as mother of pearl,
Her lips were as red as blood.
I thought her beautiful then, and she was.
Only her soul was cruel.

She gave me my dream
But took in return
My heart and a part of me.
The dream was a lovely, shining thing.
But now that I hold it close to me,
It is worth far less than I thought it would be.

CREDOS FOR THE CRITICS

By CLIFFORD M. MONTAGUE

Dramatic criticism may be defined as the art of learning and propagating the advancement of the best that is known in drama and the theatre. This function of criticism should be the sole reason for the existence of a critic, and this function is absolutely necessary before a writer of theatrical doings can be termed a critic.

The writer on drama incurs a double duty, first to learn and second to teach. He must study the theatre in general — and in particular the theatre and drama of his own time and place in relation to what is best of all that has gone before. One of the most important duties of the critic is to teach the public what is best by making clear the reasons why. It is not necessary for the critic to try to teach the playwright how to write plays — but it is his duty to teach the public HOW the playwright has written them. To do this, of course, one must first achieve a working knowledge of the masters that have gone before.

The first mark of a true critic is an eagerness to learn, even from his contemporaries. The critic must be aware of life — in general and particular — because drama is a visioning of life and the critic cannot otherwise tell a counterfeit from a true presentation unless he has some knowledge about the original. He must also know something of the aims and methods of other arts, because all the other arts are represented in drama. He must know as much as possible about the drama of other lands and times, for by the standard of relativity (though not this alone) he can judge the good from the bad. All these studies serve to furnish the critic material from which to derive deductively and inductively the principles to guide him in his appraisals, all of which can be built into a body of belief, forming a philosophy of criticism.

This body of belief, or philosophy of criticism, is necessary for the critic to do adequate work; without it he can only hope to be a reviewer. In the body of belief the critic's culture takes an important place, since to build a philosophy there must be a basis on which to premise beliefs. It will not

do for a critic to have but one solid belief which is never variable. Modern drama is not that static. A critic with only one principle may judge certain kinds of work, but the very next piece of work may demand that he broaden or materially alter his former beliefs. The critic, then, can never rest on his oars; he can never be certain that what he already knows equips him fully to appreciate (much less criticise) the next important dramatist that appears. Therefore he should keep his mind fresh and open, to receive and evaluate each new impression that is possible. Thus, in evolving a body of belief that will come to his aid no matter how varied may be the material on which he has to work, the critic has need of a working and elastic philosophy. The duty of the critic is not to state dogmatically how dramas should be written but to explain HOW they have been made, the reasons why they were so made and the ultimate value of the new art to the whole set of precepts that have gone before.

In the ages of Shakespeare, Molière, Racine, and Sheridan, there were few differences as to how dramatists should write plays. Though their works differed as to theme, mood and message, nevertheless the matter of form and technique remained practically the same. In dealing with such periods it has always been easy for the critic to determine a fixed standard by which to measure the technical aspects and merits of a play. But this condition of creation and criticism has changed in the present period of drama, when new types are being evolved daily, and not only evolved but established. For the dramatist, the present age can be identified in no better way than with the shibboleth: "There are no rules for writing plays." And for the critics it might be added: "There are no rules for judging them."

Thus, in this eclectic age of creation, the critic should be able to fall back upon that attitude of mind known to philosophers as "pragmatism." The pragmatists — despairing of ever finding any absolute, unalterable truth, even tempted to doubt its existence — rely for the immediate purpose of thinking upon any theory that seems for the moment to fit the facts, and whenever this theory is controverted by more catholic experience relinquish it cheerfully in favor of some more suitable hypothesis which is adequate to serve in turn.

They do not ask for the ultimate truth; they ask only for a theory that seems to serve, and by this modesty they insure their philosophy against disaster of disproof. Our drama critics seemingly have not yet learned the value of this philosophy. If they used this method they might save themselves the ultimate ridicule which will be the lot of the present-day critics when posterity looks back to see how wrong they were in their prognostications.

Pragmatism can exist only in an age that is able, without discomfort, to disbelieve in dogma. Pragmatism is practised in all things in the present age except drama criticism, and there is no valid reason why the art of criticism cannot keep pace with the age in which it is practised. Since our contemporary dramatists are not burdened with any creeds for making plays (any method will serve, all methods serve — providing only that they prove themselves serviceable) and as criticism always follows creation, it is apparent that contemporary critics should maintain an open mind toward any and all sorts of efforts, and not judge a work in reference to any predetermined rule — but only in reference to the particular intention of the playwright.

Technique in drama is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end. Many critics in this phase of their estimates nearly always go wrong, since they consider that technique must be the first concern of the artist — while in reality it can be of minor consideration. Rather, it may be said that any method may be adjudged good unless it betrays the playwright into a compromise or falsification of life, or of the art he is using. Also, clever workmanship exercised only for the purpose of showing-off is not admirable, regardless of how well it be done.

Since there is no longer any rule for making plays it should be the duty of the critic to refrain from arguing in favor of any particular method against another. The duty of the critic should be to explain the particular formula that the dramatist has used, and how well he used that formula to achieve his ends.

Any work of art is good if it forces the spectator to imagine or realize some truth in life, and any effort is bad if it fails to do this. This is the final test of efficiency. (Note that it does not include any question of technique.) By a

standard so essential and catholic as this the critic may equitably estimate the merits of all plays, regardless of their period, form, technique or other merits.

Another thing in which the critic should interest himself is consideration of how much sincerity the author has invested in his work. True, hell may be paved with good intentions, but if a man has worked honestly and earnestly to say something new and true, he must at least be credited with discovering a new pavement, even if it is usable only in hell.

There are other moral qualities without which the critic cannot properly function, no matter how broad his culture or great his equipment. One of the first qualities a critic must have is sympathy. He must not only appreciate what he likes, but also what he does not like, provided there is an adequate reason why other people should like it. He should judge a work in accordance with the endeavor of the author. He must find out what sort of effect the author intended to produce and then to what extent he succeeded. It is not fair that the critic judge a new type of play adversely because its effect is totally different from the last play he saw. He should have no prejudices. Although one may have suffered through a number of bad plays by a certain author, the critic must be ready to recognize the merit of that author's latest work if it surpasses the previous ones.

Since a part of criticism is to propagate the best it is at once evident that the function of criticism should not be destructive but constructive, and here again is another reason why critics should have sympathy. At the present time the predominant idea seems to be that the work of the critic is mainly to make derogatory remarks about plays and their authors, but it should not be the function of the critic to waste thought on bad plays. Most of these would die a natural death if left alone and the critic should ignore them. His duty is to discover what is good, to explain why it is good, and to do all in his power to make the good prevail. This is more than enough to keep the critic busy; also, it will keep him from mistakenly attacking individuals as well as worthless and bad plays.

There is yet another moral quality with which, naturally, all critics should be equipped. This is the delicate faculty of

being disinterested. The critic should always tell the truth as he sees it, of course, as well as remaining impervious to any ulterior considerations. The really good, and therefore disinterested critic will not be influenced by that fetish of editors and publishers whose blood seems to be "what the public wants." If the public always knew and wanted the best that is known and thought in drama there would be no work for the critic to do.

It is not necessary that our critics should for a moment consider whether or not the public is likely to enjoy the things they have to say; however, they need very little admonition on this point. They do, however, need admonition on a point closely allied: the critics should give up writing for that dubious popularity of both kinds — the one that comes with pleasing everyone and the kind that comes to the critic who attacks all things. In this respect, the critic should always be inconsiderate of himself, which is just another way of being disinterested.

The critic, by teaching the public to appreciate what is best in the plays it has already seen, may prepare the public to appreciate what is good in the plays that our advancing dramatists will set before it ten or twenty years from now. In this manner real criticism could not only follow but actually precede creation. Thus, the critic in functioning as he should, may be not only an expositor of the best that has been done, but he may also be the herald of the best that is to be. If our critics can do that, then — and then only — can it be said that they have reached the top-flight of the art of criticism.

And only by top-flight criticism from our critics can the art of criticism regain its rightful prominence in American letters, since it is the only way it can keep pace with the growth and development of the fine drama that is now sprouting and shooting out in all parts of the country: a development taking place so rapidly and thoroughly that the theatre in America is undergoing a definite renaissance.

WANDERER OF THE WINDS

By Elvira B. Wallin

Oh, I would be up and away again —
With the sea wind's salt refrain again —
With the gale and the mist and wind again,
I would be up and away.
For the chambers of a city mart
Leave empty places in my heart
Which only the winds can fill.

A wanderer loves
The sharp clean winds of a mountain top
Like a sword's sweet swing;
The warning winds off a cliff's vast drop . . .
The winds, the winds that nothing will stop.
And the knife wind with its cruel keen blade
That's hated man since he was made.

To the sighing winds I'd steer my course —
To the sighing winds that sing for the lost,
The winds that dance during Pentecost,
And the heathen winds that won't be crossed;
The sorcerer winds that cast a spell,
That play the ghost with a ruined bell.
The desert winds of the west and east —
The hermit winds
That have no love for man nor beast.

Oh, I would be up and away again —
Roaming the earth with the wind;
With the wind
That centuries have called brother,
That the earth could call grandmother;
The winds that sail the seven oceans,
The winds that follow their own sure notions;
Winds that are cruel and winds that are kind,
And winds that leave the world behind;
God blest and Devil curst —
Those that are best and those that are worst;
The eternal wind of a ninety-mile gale.
Winds of the worlds and universe —
Winds . . .
All winds, hail!

VALUE – PER SE

By LORENA M. GARY

Back of all discussions of human values, behind every opinion concerning what constitutes true worth, regarding every criticism which seeks to explain why a piece of writing, be it prose or poetry, is great literature, there is one question which, so far as I can discover, has never been explicitly and finally answered. The question is this: Is value in any given experience within the experience itself or is it within us? This is a question as old as philosophy. Socrates and Plato had as firm convictions about it as had Emerson and Carlyle. Religious creeds have been based upon it. The Puritans and the Quakers, the Mormons and the Christian Scientists have determined their standards and beliefs by it. Judgments of literature have been made by it. The reviewer for the London Mercury declares that Sinclair Lewis is the greatest American novelist; the professor in American Literature calls Edgar Guest a modern Longfellow; the college freshman complacently confides to you that Booth Tarkington is his favorite novelist.

All these suggestions are the result of attempts to estimate values. They go back to the same question: How much of the value is in the experience and how much is in us? One who tries to answer this feels his impotence before the convincing arguments which have been presented upon each side of the question. The illimitable possibilities of interpretation, involving as they do — time, place, material worth, aesthetic quality, eternal or spiritual truths, human ability to comprehend the abstract, make one feel as Browning felt when he said:

> Now, who shall arbitrate?
> Ten men love what I hate,
> Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
> Ten, who in ears and eyes
> Match me: we all surmise,
> They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

The last line states the question in a more subtle way. Whom shall my soul believe? Where can I find a standard by which to judge the worth of human experience? How much must depend upon the experience and how much upon me? If I can answer that question about human experience, I can answer it about literary value, for literature is the tru-

est and deepest record of human life. After I have answered it to fit my own life, I cannot be sure that it will be of any help to another. The best that I can do is to discover and select the elements in a given literary experience which mean most to me because of their beauty, their sincerity, their truth, their ability to arouse in me emotion of any kind, or their power to make me think. Now all of these elements must be somewhere hidden beneath the surface. Their value is in the literary experience as it comes to me from the printed page. In that respect their value is intrinsic. As much of their value will come to me as is within my power of understanding. Sometimes, however, I may attach more value to the elements than seems to be there. For instance, I may read Whitman's poem on Death, "Darest thou now O Soul," in one mood and feel the influence of high adventure, the daring spirit of the poet as he goes into the unknown region. In another mood, a more critical and doubtful one perhaps, I may read it and feel that Whitman is far too vague and abstract for human interpretation. Surely the poem must have some power hidden in it if it can move a reader at any time. That hidden power in literature is its intrinsic value. It is there at all times. Occasionally the process of understanding and interpretation works differently. Take another example. The first time I read *Sartor Resartus* I did not like it. Later I had a course in college which compelled me to study the works of Thomas Carlyle. Again I read *Sartor Resartus.* The second time I read it I liked it. I found that it had sincerity, it had truth, and that it had power to make me think. It had all those qualities the first time I read it. What had happened? Had the value of the classic changed? No! Its intrinsic worth had been there and no amount of neglect, stupidity, or contempt could alter it one iota. This fact might lead one to think of another truth which must always be kept in mind by some of those who make sweeping statements about literary values. It is this quotation taken from the ancient critic, Longinus: "The works of the great are our invariable standard." It will be seen that the intrinsic value may be an eternal worth, as that great force borne in upon us by the "Everlasting Yea" in *Sartor Resartus,* or it may be a momentary one which comes and goes as our mood changes in such a poem as Words-

worth's "The Lost Love." One stanza will show what I mean:

> A violet by a mossy stone
> Half hidden from the eye!
> Fair as a star, when only one
> Is shining in the sky

This poem moves me because of its imagery, its beauty, its simplicity; but it does not plunge me into abstract thought as does the "Everlasting Yea." Is it any the less valuable? Not in its place and for its purpose! Literature has to maintain a balance of its elements even as human life must be varied. To say that one element is more valuable than any other is to make judgment upon that which cannot be measured by any human standard — that is, any standard except that of taste or of preference. I do not mean to say that all literature worthy of the name has the same amount of intrinsic value, but I do mean that any literature which has any intrinsic value based upon the elements of beauty, sincerity, truth, ability to arouse emotion, or power to stimulate thought, will be of value to me if I have the understanding which is necessary to experience the effect of any of these elements. Therefore the value is both in the work itself and in me. The writer, when he created the work, may not have had in mind the definition of value which states that it is the relative status of a thing, the estimate in which it is held according to its real or supposed worth or importance. He was concerned with his inspiration; his message; or his desire to express his deepest thought; I am concerned with what his inspiration, his message, or his self-expression can do for me. More than that I am concerned with those literary experiences which come from mental contacts with the greatest story-tellers; the greatest poets; the greatest philosophers. If I can keep my standard of value up to their high level, then I can read the London Mercury without fear that Sinclair Lewis will overshadow our contemporary writers; I can smile at the attack of the American Literature professor upon the classical Mr. Longfellow; I can suggest to the college freshman that he read Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Priestley, W. H. Hudson, or Melville.

My values will perhaps be those of Sainte-Beuve:

"If a reader has once learned the secret of the value of the great, he will never be able to lend his complete approval to something on a lower level."

POEMS

By Alan J. Pifer

SUCCESS

Pain is the seed;
Hope is the shower,
Faith the vine,
Success the flower.

Seeds are many,
But vines are lost,
Nipped in the bud
By an early frost.

NOVEMBER

A little sun
Of a piercing day
To flout the year
On its wintry way.

A little warmth
At the grayish dawn
To frighten the veil
Off the whitened lawn.

A little fleece
When a prying gust
Has stabbed my back
With its icy thrust.

A little love
To warm my heart
Chilled by a word
Like a poisoned dart.

INEVITABILITY

"The river cannot fill the sea,
Nor winds blow ever east,"
"As moon doth grow, the tide must flow,"
Are laws till earth has ceased.
The butterfly cannot be bold;

She was not made for fighting.
Even the bee must gently step,
On thistledown a-lighting.
And man is man, and so will hate
His neighbor and his kin.
This is law, and this is proof;
What is, has ever been.

PORTRAIT AT SUNSET

Where juniper ridge meets rock-strewn field,
And vales are warm in a soft pine quilt,
Where alder bush is thick in swamps,
And squirrels rustle the crackling leaves,
Where farmers grow their Spys and Macs
And take their Russets to the cider mill,
And each day's work is a sacred rite,
A rite well-hallowed by the hand of time,
Here there lives the last of his line,
The Native, a son of Yankee stock.
Born and raised and wintered old; —
From the homestead walls he never strayed;
His world extends to the township line.

His house was built in colonial times,
Framed in a day and pegged together.
With roof pulled low to shield its eyes,
It snuggles beneath the curve of a hill
And dreams of its youth in the kindly sun.
Before his house with stance defiant
Stands the Native, old and bent,
Worn by the fight with a rock-ribbed soil,
The struggle to live off a farm that's poor.
And now as the glow of the evening sun
Shows the trees in black silhouette
Down at the orchard's western wall,
He turns his eyes that he may not know
The pines have vanquished his pasture row.

POEMS

By Elizabeth J. Savage

SPECTRE

I memorized you long ago.
I do not need to see your face,
Nor watch you move again to know
Your body's beauty, or the grace
Of every gesture, swift or slow.

But ah! the dark elusive mind,
In secret cells beneath the bone,
May wreck at will the whole design,
Corrode the writing from the stone —
And this without one outward sign.

With all the honest senses say,
With all the quick heart understands,
The lurking mind can still betray,
And, any night or any day,
A ghost may chill me with your lips,
A stranger bruise me with your hands.

FULL MOON

Curve your fingers into a silver cup
To catch the stuff of the moonlight.
Lap it up!
Scent of wild crabapple, strangely blent
With taste of honeysuckle and of grape.
Untwine your fingers from their hollowed shape
When you have drained the potion to the end —
No living man again may call you friend
Save he who drinks of midnight and the moon.
You shall go parched and hungry, late and soon
Forever seeking. Pain shall be your mother.
You shall be beautiful and lonely always
And mad. The moon and I shall call you brother.
Curve your slender hands in a crystal cup
To catch the stuff of the moonlight,
Lap it up!

TO NIGHT

I had forgotten, it has been so long,
The cool touch of your lips upon my hair,
Your shadowed presence fragrant as a prayer
In some far garden under quiet skies.

I had forgotten, it has been so long,
How it would be to come to you alone,
With never a word — only the dreams we've known,
Silent and deep and lovely in your eyes.

SEA NYMPH

Do not ask how well I love you:
I shall have to say
You are not one half so dear
As one white line of spray,
Broken, restless, brilliant, changing
On some dark still night,
Or the single haunting challenge
Of a lighthouse light.
I would give you without quibble
For one twilight mood
On my lonely, sand-girt island,
Strung with myrtle wood.
And so — and thus —
Yet I do love you! Must you know how well?
It is good to have you near me,
Do not make me tell!

CRY FOR EXPERIENCE

Cut to the bone!
Cut to the bone!
Knife the fruit away from the stone;
Scrape the surface,
Shave it bare,
Raw, exquisitely aware
Of the salt of the earth, of the sea, of the air!
Cut to the bone!

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